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ABSTRACT

The Goal 1 Technical Planning Subgroup proposed an early childhood assessment system that involved assessment of children before they entered kindergarten, at the time of entrance into kindergarten, and during the kindergarten year. The report that contained the proposal, and requests for feedback, were disseminated to nearly 1,000 individuals and more than 80 organizations interested in early childhood education. A total of 169 responses were received from 184 respondents (15 were submitted jointly by 2 or more colleagues). The present document analyzes the responses. Respondents indicated strong overall support for the proposed assessment system. Components of the proposal that received particular praise were those that involve the use of a multidimensional approach, multiple data sources, and national sampling; data collection at various times in the school year; development of new assessment instruments; and creation of a national body to oversee the assessment. Respondents raised three concerns: (1) Assessment must not divert resources from programs; (2) Assessment reports should not be separated from contextual information about children's educational experiences; and (3) Inappropriate tracking of children should be prevented. Respondents made recommendations concerning the determination of readiness standards; equitable assessment of children; sampling procedures; and refinements of methodology. Respondents' comments are interspersed throughout the document. Appended materials include lists of members of the Goal 1 Resource Group and Technical Planning Subgroup and organizations whose members submitted responses to the report. (BC)

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NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS PANEL

REACTIONS TO THE GOAL 1 TECHNICAL PLANNING SUBGROUP REPORT ON SCHOOL READINESS

Report to the
National Education Goals Panel

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Senior Research Associate

March 27, 1992

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92–03

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Reactions to the Goal 1 Technical Planning Subgroup Report on School Readiness

Background

The first National Education Goal adopted by the President and the nation's Governors states that by the Year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn. In order to determine how best to measure the nation's progress toward this ambitious Goal, the National Education Goals Panel appointed a Resource Group of nationally recognized educators in the field of early childhood education to examine the broad issues involved in measuring school readiness (see Appendix A).

After careful deliberation, the Resource Group concluded in a report to the Panel in March 1991, that even though we already know a great deal about conditions that foster children's potential for learning, we lack accurate, direct measures that can tell us "the extent to which children do, in fact, have the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for formal learning."[1] The Resource Group recommended that a three-part early childhood assessment system be developed to provide comprehensive information to policymakers about the status of the nation's children so that state and national progress toward this Goal could be reliably assessed in the future. The three parts would consist of a before school assessment, a school entrance assessment, and an in-school assessment.

A Technical Planning Subgroup, consisting of experts in early childhood education, child development, and assessment, was formed to investigate the assessment issue in more depth (see Appendix B). The Subgroup's charge was to examine first the issues associated with the development and implementation of the national in-school assessment component of the proposed system, which would be administered to children during their kindergarten year.

The final report of the Goal 1 Technical Planning Subgroup was presented by Dr. Ernest Boyer and Dr. Sharon Lynn Kagan at the September 4, 1991, Panel meeting. In the report, the Subgroup recommended that the in-school component of the assessment draw a profile of children's early learning and development along five dimensions:

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[1] National Education Goals Panel, Measuring Progress Toward the National Education Goals: Potential Indicators and Measurement Strategies, p. 6, March 25, 1991.

1) physical well-being and motor development;
2) social and emotional development;
3) approaches toward learning;
4) language usage; and
5) cognition and general knowledge.

They recommended that the assessment gather information from multiple sources (parent reports; teacher reports; performance portfolios; and profiles of children's skills, knowledge, and development), and that this information be collected at several points during the kindergarten year. They recommended that a national sample of students be assessed every three years to reduce the costs of data collection and to safeguard against potential misuses of assessment instruments for classifying individual students or groups of students. Finally, they recommended that a national body be established to oversee the development, implementation, and evaluation of such an assessment.

Purpose and Structure of This Report

Upon completion of the presentation at the September 4th Panel meeting, the Panel requested that the Technical Planning Subgroup's report be disseminated broadly in order to provide an opportunity for a wide variety of individuals and organizations interested in the care and education of young children to react to the ideas presented in it. A preliminary summary of the feedback that had been received by mid-January was presented at the January 24, 1992, Panel meeting. The purpose of this report is to present a more detailed analysis of all feedback received, and the Resource Group's reactions to it. This report will discuss:

1) Dissemination of the Technical Planning Subgroup's report;
2) Responses received;
3) The strong level of support for the proposed assessment from a wide variety of groups;
4) Areas of the report singled out by respondents as particularly meritorious:
   a) multidimensional approach;
   b) collection of data from multiple sources, using multiple methods;
   c) national sample of children, rather than individual assessment;
   d) collection of data at several points in time;
   e) emphasis on need to allow sufficient time to develop, field test, implement, and validate instruments; and
   f) creation of a national body to oversee the development, implementation, and evaluation of the proposed assessment system.

This report will then discuss some fundamental concerns raised by respondents about assessment of young children in general, and the Goals process. It is important that the reader understand the conviction with which these concerns are held by respondents, because they frame some of the specific report feedback. These fundamental concerns are as follows:

1) Assessment must not divert resources from programs and services that directly benefit children.
2) Assessment results should not be reported separately from contextual information on children's developmental and educational experiences.
3) Extreme caution must be exercised to prevent inappropriate and inaccurate labeling and tracking of children.

Finally, this report will discuss suggestions offered by respondents which are specific to the Technical Planning Subgroup's proposed assessment system. The topics which will be discussed are as follows:

1) Determining acceptable readiness standard;
2) Assessing diverse groups of children equitably (e.g., linguistic and cultural minorities, children with disabilities);
3) Sampling procedures;
4) Refinements to methodological components.

Dissemination of the Report

During late December 1991, nearly 1,000 copies of the Goal 1 Technical Planning Subgroup Report on School Readiness were disseminated to individuals and to more than eighty national organizations, with an accompanying request for feedback. The dissemination was not intended to be a random survey. Rather, it was an attempt to circulate the document to a targeted cross-section of people interested in the area of early childhood education. Reactions and comments were sought from representatives of the following groups interested in the care and education of young children:

- **specialists in early care and early childhood education** (e.g., National Association for the Education of Young Children, National Head Start Association, Southern Association on Children Under Six, Children's Defense Fund);
- **parents, families, and communities** (e.g., National PTA, Families and Work Institute, Home and School Institute);
- **teachers and schools** (e.g., National Education Association, Independent Professional Educators Association; National School Boards Association);
- **health care workers** (e.g., Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs, American Medical Association, National Health Education Consortium);

- **bilingual educators and specialists in second language learning** (e.g., National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning, National Association for Bilingual Education, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages);
- **educators specializing in the education of children with disabilities and exceptionalities** (e.g., National Center for Learning Disabilities, Council for Exceptional Children, Children with Attention Deficit Disorders, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association);
- **researchers and assessment specialists** (e.g., American Psychological Association, Educational Testing Service, RAND Corporation, Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, colleges and universities); and
- **state and federal government** (e.g., Office of Special Education, U.S. Department of Education; National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education; Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs, U.S. Department of Education; Administration for Children, Youth, and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).

In addition to this broad dissemination targeted at agencies and organizations, 133 individuals with special expertise were asked to evaluate the report's technical merits. This group consisted of early childhood education specialists at state departments of education and distinguished researchers and scholars specializing in early childhood education, child development, and assessment.

It is important to note that respondents (both technical and non-technical) were not asked to focus on any particular components of the proposed assessment system or any particular ideas presented in the Technical Planning Subgroup's report. Rather, they were told that the Panel would like to hear reactions to the report from a broad-based group of experts in the field, and they were invited to review the document and send their comments to the Panel. Respondents were free to comment on any aspects of the report that they wished, and many did so in great detail.

Responses Received

A total of 169 responses to the report, comprising 252 pages of feedback, was received from 184 respondents (15 responses were submitted jointly by two or more colleagues). Responses were received from 43 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Canada. A list of organizations which submitted responses to the report can be found in Appendix C. The reader should note that while some statements submitted to the National Education Goals Panel represent official positions taken by an organization, others were submitted as the views of individuals who did not presume to represent the views of their institutions.

In order to give the reader a sense of the different constituency groups represented by the 184 respondents to the report, the following breakdown is provided. It is based on respondents' institutional affiliations, titles (e.g., M.D., R.N.), and in some cases, self-identification, and should be viewed only as a very rough estimate. Subgroups do not total 184, since categories are not mutually exclusive (see page 56):[1]

58 **specialists in early care and early childhood education** (includes 23 early childhood specialists from 16 state departments of education; 4 representatives of the National Head Start Association; 9 representatives of the Southern Association on Children Under Six; 3 representatives of the National Association for the Education of Young Children; 4 representatives of the Children's Defense Fund);

20 **parents or parent/family representatives** (includes 3 representatives of the National PTA; 3 state PTA presidents; 2 commission consultants/members of state PTAs; 1 parent involvement specialist and 2 family education specialists at state departments of education; 3 self-identified parents);

22 **teachers, teacher representatives, local school and school district staff** (includes 1 elementary school principal; 4 local school district staff; 8 self-identified teachers or former teachers; 8 representatives of the National PTA or its state affiliates);

15 **health care providers** (includes 2 self-identified nurses; 3 self-identified physicians; 3 hospital staff members; 10 representatives of national medical organizations);

13 **bilingual educators or specialists in second language learning** (includes 6 professors; 2 school district staff members; 1 U.S. Department of Education staff member);

10 **educators specializing in the education of children with disabilities and exceptionalities** (includes 6 representatives of national disability/exceptionality organizations; 3 professors of special education; 1 director of special education at a state department of education);

62 **researchers, assessment specialists, professors and other representatives of higher education** (includes 2 deans; 1 college president; 13 researchers at research, development, and assessment centers; and 44 professors of education, human development, family and individual studies, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and linguistics); and

57 **state and federal government agency employees** (includes 36 state department of education staff members specializing in early childhood, family and adult, compensatory, or special education; 6 state superintendents or associate superintendents of education; 3 members of state boards of education (2 of whom also serve as the state board president); 5 U.S. Department of Education staff; 1 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services staff).

Enthusiastic Support for the Proposed Assessment

Reaction to the early childhood assessment approach proposed by the Goal 1 Technical Planning Subgroup was overwhelmingly positive. One hundred and thirty respondents made specific favorable comments about the proposed assessment system. Many pledged continued support and assistance to the National Education Goals Panel to see that the proposed assessment system becomes a reality.

It is important to note that support for the assessment came from across the nation, from technical and non-technical reviewers alike, and from across all targeted subgroups. Of the 130 respondents who expressed positive reactions to the assessment, 48 were specialists in early care and early childhood education; 10 were parents or parent representatives; 14 were teachers or teacher representatives; 13 were health care providers; 4 were bilingual educators or specialists in second language learning; 7 were specialists in educational disabilities or exceptionalities; 43 were researchers or assessment specialists; and 42 were state or federal government agency staff.

The following sample of comments reflects the enthusiastic level of support for the Technical Planning Subgroup's ideas.

SPECIALISTS IN EARLY CARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION:

Southern Association on Children Under Six
representative, **SOUTH CAROLINA:**
"Assessment of young children has long been a concern of mine. Involved directly in child development programs since the early 1970's, I have seen too many children incorrectly labeled. Now that I've read your report, I am encouraged that at last, a national group is on the right track in assessing young children. The recommendations listed in the report are excellent... I commend each of you for the excellence of your report. I will help any way I can to see that your plan is adopted. Let me know what I can do to help."

Early childhood educator, **NEW HAMPSHIRE:**
"Goal 1 is so simply stated that it gives no hint of the magnitude of the work which lies ahead to gather data which provide an adequate basis for decisions. This report defines a national assessment of kindergarten students in a way that truly productive work can proceed toward ultimately reaching Goal 1."

National Association for the Education of Young Children, **WASHINGTON, DC:**
"NAEYC commends the Goal 1 Resource Group and Technical Planning Subgroup for their thorough and careful consideration of the complex issues inherent in a national assessment of kindergarten children... As this plan moves toward implementation, it holds great promise for contributing to the knowledge base about early childhood development and learning. If implemented as conceptualized, it should also contribute to improved curriculum and instruction during the early years of school."

Early childhood educator, **INDIANA:**
"In my last year [in Indiana], the issue of school readiness was one of paramount importance. We worked toward a state understanding of the disastrous effects of denying access to kindergarten age-eligible children based on a one-shot screening instrument... The document I received certainly reflects the exceptional expertise of the panel and is badly needed on a national level. I strongly support the information and include the following points for review."

Child care professional, **NEW MEXICO:**
"I am reassured by the reiteration of concerns in the report... These are my concerns exactly. If the assessment program exists within these limits, then it can be a valuable tool... Looking at the names on the Goal 1 Resource Group and on the Technical Planning Subgroup, I am further reassured that you understand the learning of the young child (birth through age 8). The concern of many early childhood educators is that this first educational goal will be used to justify more 'academic' teaching of young children. If this first educational goal is used, instead, to encourage more 'developmentally appropriate practice' in programs serving young children, then it will be a great step toward helping our young children become critical thinkers, creative problem solvers and life-long learners."

Child care professional, **FLORIDA:**
"I have read the Technical Planning Subgroup's report on the proposed National Early Childhood Assessment. Prior to reading the report, I made a list of concerns I had with regard to the administration of standardized tests and assessments to preschool and kindergarten children. I was gratified to find that these concerns were addressed and alleviated in the report... The plan outlined by the Technical Planning Subgroup is excellent and should be lauded. It is a plan that I, as a child care professional, would like to see supported and implemented."

PARENTS AND PARENT/FAMILY REPRESENTATIVES

National Council on Disability representative, **WASHINGTON, DC:**
"I strongly commend the panel and the task force for the report on assessment which is an integral part of the President's first education goal. Without assessment and early intervention many children with disabilities would not be prepared to enter school. As the mother of two children with disabilities, I am strongly convinced that this assessment process is vital."

Parent, teacher, early childhood educator, **WEST VIRGINIA:**
"As a parent of four, kindergarten teacher, adjunct instructor and [representative] of the West Virginia Association for Young Children, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to react to the Technical Planning Subgroup Report on School Readiness. I'd like to commend you for your hard work and dedication and it is very obvious that extensive hard work and time have been put into this report and the main focus has truly been <u>the child</u>."

Families and Work Institute, **NEW YORK:**
"I can not imagine this task having been done better than the proposed plan. It is thoughtful, comprehensive, and holistic. If implemented as planned, it would be a significant contribution to the field, making the notion of assessing readiness a constructive reality."

National PTA, **ILLINOIS:**
"The National PTA supports the development of a system of assessment which would provide information about the status of the nation's children as they enter school."

Parent/Child, Inc., **TEXAS:**
"The Technical Planning Subgroup's Report on the development of the System of Assessment for Kindergarten Children is critical and could provide a system to improve educational services and outcomes for young children."

Parent and educational researcher, **WASHINGTON, DC:**
"As a parent and educator I am very much in agreement with both the philosophy and the implementation strategies proposed in assessing progress toward meeting Goal 1. I think the report is excellent because it shows a deep knowledge of young children and their welfare."

TEACHERS AND TEACHER REPRESENTATIVES

National Education Association, **WASHINGTON, DC:**
"I would like to commend the technical subgroup for the excellent work they have done. The issues raised by the report are important ones and they have been thoughtfully treated. I believe the subgroup's recommendations would greatly advance our understanding of the dimensions of the school readiness challenge. They deserve the full support of the National Education Goals Panel... The National Education Association (NEA) believes the system of assessment proposed by the Technical Planning Subgroup Report on School Readiness is well conceived, and a sorely needed and welcome alternative to traditional and detrimental testing processes."

Teacher, **NORTH CAROLINA:**
"As a classroom teacher (and former program director, college professor, and bureaucrat) I applaud your work on school readiness. Your recommendations are insightful and years ahead of present practice. I am confident that this report represents the best early childhood 'thinking' and will be received with praises and support. Thank you for your wonderful work."

Council for American Private Education, **NEW YORK:**
"My initial response to the National Education Goals Panel's Technical Planning Subgroup Report on School Readiness is quite positive. The underlying philosophy is based on solid child development principles and presents a unique opportunity for this nation to rethink its approach to young children... As an early childhood educator of some thirty years, I applaud this effort and commend the Panel's extensive and thoughtful work."

HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

Child psychiatrist, **CALIFORNIA:**
"This is a most impressive and ambitious plan, but one which I view as an essential task for education. My comments are mainly that I agree with the perspective and approach advocated here; it is state-of-the-art in terms of current research into early childhood."

National Association of Children's Hospitals and Related Institutions, **VIRGINIA:**
"The development of a comprehensive early childhood assessment system is absolutely essential for documenting that all children in America will... start school ready to learn by the year 2000. The technical panel has accomplished a yeoman's task in formulating this proposal."

National Perinatal Association, **FLORIDA:**
"We commend the National Education Goals Panel Resource Group on an excellent report and urge action to implement the report's proposals."

Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors, **MARYLAND:**
"The Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors (ASTDD) fully supports the multi-faceted and integrated approach addressed in the Technical Planning Subgroup Report. We believe that such an approach represents an important and realistic direction for American education to take... We feel we can best accomplish our oral health objectives through programs that effectively and comprehensively integrate educational achievement with health status. Your Technical Planning Subgroup Report advocates such an approach and therefore garners our full support."

National Black Nurses Association, **WASHINGTON, DC:**
"Please convey our appreciation to the members of the Technical Planning Subgroup for an excellent report on school readiness. The proposed National Assessment would add immeasurably to our knowledge concerning the health of children."

BILINGUAL EDUCATORS AND SPECIALISTS IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING:

Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs, U.S. Department of Education:
"This is to thank you for sending us the Technical Planning Subgroup Report on School Readiness. We have read it carefully and found it to be an excellent document delving into all aspects of Early Childhood Assessment. The subgroup, we believe, is to be congratulated for such a well thought-out report."

Local school district staff member and specialist in English for Speakers of Other Languages, **VIRGINIA:**
"I strongly support the development of a new assessment system for early childhood educational readiness. The present assessment measures on the market are not adequate for the task as defined in this document."

Researcher specializing in second language learning, **CANADA**:
"The Subgroup's recommendation that a system of assessment be designed which examines multiple dimensions of child development strikes me as a bold move. The entire plan holds great promise for increasing our understanding of the diversity of needs which must be accommodated at the onset of formal schooling if we want to deal with pressing issues of equity in education."

SPECIALISTS IN EDUCATIONAL DISABILITIES AND EXCEPTIONALITIES:

National Center for Learning Disabilities, **NEW YORK**:
"The National Center for Learning Disabilities supports the general concept presented in the Technical Planning Subgroup Report on School Readiness. It will be helpful to have a global picture of kindergarten children as they approach formal schooling."

Council for Exceptional Children, **VIRGINIA**:
"Given that this goal is the only one which specifically mentions students with disabilities, we were quite pleased with the Interim Resource Group and the Technical Planning Subgroup Reports... We believe that the proposed assessment is essential to determining our progress towards school readiness."

Children with Attention Deficit Disorders, **MASSACHUSETTS**:
"You have clearly agreed to tackle a rather ambitious and complex project, that of measuring school readiness. Our compliments and thanks for your initial work."

RESEARCHERS AND ASSESSMENT SPECIALISTS

Assessment specialist, **WASHINGTON, DC**:
"There is little I could add or suggest regarding the Goal 1 Technical Planning Subgroup recommendations regarding readiness for school. It is eminently reasonable to carry out the high-quality, multi-faceted assessment program recommended, thus putting community and professional resources behind the attempt to improve the quality of children's learning in school. In order to accomplish this, measurement of child characteristics is essential... Congratulations to the Resource Group on a fine report, and a reasonable set of recommendations."

Researcher, **NEW HAMPSHIRE**:
"The technical report offers a realistic yet optimistic approach to assessing readiness given the state-of-the-art of early childhood assessment. I was especially pleased to see the sensitivity to the potential unintended effects of assessment approaches or objectives on the field."

Professor of education, **HAWAII:**
"I commend the Technical Planning Subgroup for the outstanding job they have done on their report concerning Goal 1 of the National Education Goals. If we are, in fact, going to try to assess school readiness, the kind of multifaceted assessment indicated in this report is the best and most appropriate way to do so. In fact, to do less than what is described would be a grave disservice to children."

Assessment specialist, **NEW JERSEY:**
"I read the Goal 1 Technical Planning Subgroup Report on School Readiness with interest. It is generally excellent, both in spirit and substance."

STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Acting State Commissioner of Education:
"I commend the Technical Planning Subgroup on the quality of their work for the National Education Goals Panel. Their report reflects a comprehensive view of child development that has great potential for enriching our society's view of the learning that takes place in the early years."

State Superintendent of Schools:
"In general, I applaud and wholeheartedly agree with the concept, intent, and purpose of the proposed early childhood assessment... In closing, I would like to express enthusiastic support of the subgroup's plan."

ALABAMA State Department of Education staff member:
"The Resource Group is to be commended on their insightful, caring, and productive work on behalf of young children. Their recommendations for a multi-faceted approach to assessment are well-founded and applauded... Perhaps most of all, the Resource Group gave strong emphasis to the need to consider the children's feelings when involving them in assessment. Too often, anxieties and frustrations of children have been subordinated to an overzealous quest for data -- not so in the report of the Resource Group. This is a strong, compassionate, knowledgeable effort that upholds the dignity of childhood."

GEORGIA State Department of Education:
"The Georgia Department of Education supports the assumptions, timelines, and activities which are outlined in the report. The activities were designed to ensure an appropriate assessment that is reliable and valid."

KENTUCKY State Department of Education staff member:
"The ideas contained in this paper should have been developed over a century ago."

Areas of the Report Singled Out as Particularly Meritorious

In addition to the strong level of overall support for the proposed early childhood assessment system, six specific areas were singled out for praise by substantial numbers of respondents. Since respondents were not asked to focus on any particular issues, it is noteworthy that praise for the same six components appeared throughout the comments.

Support for multidimensional approach. The early childhood assessment system which was designed by the Technical Planning Subgroup is based on four fundamental assumptions, which appear in the Subgroup's September 4, 1991, report. The first of these assumptions is as follows:

1. *Being prepared to participate successfully in formal schooling is a lengthy, complex, and multidetermined process, reflecting the complex nature of child growth and development and the multiple forces that shape young children's lives. Thus, an adequate assessment of young children's preparedness for formal schooling must incorporate all facets of the growing child, and must utilize information from a variety of sources.*[2]

In order to assess all facets of the growing child, the Technical Planning Subgroup proposed that the national assessment must draw a profile of children's early learning and development along five dimensions that describe the whole child:

1) physical well-being;
2) social and emotional development;
3) approaches toward learning;
4) language usage; and
5) cognition and general knowledge.

As the Subgroup point out in their report, this multidimensional approach contrasts sharply with traditional "readiness" tests which attempt to evaluate children's preparedness for school in a narrow, unidimensional manner, typically focusing only on cognitive skills.

The Subgroup's multidimensional approach to assessment and the comprehensive nature of their definition of readiness received resounding support. Over one-third of all respondents (63) specifically mentioned their support for this idea. These 63 included 21 early childhood educators, 7 parents/parent

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[2] National Education Goals Panel, Potential Strategies for Long-Term Indicator Development: Reports of the Technical Planning Subgroups, p. 9, September 4, 1991.

representatives, 7 teachers/teacher representatives, 2 health care providers, 1 specialist in bilingual education and second language learning, 5 specialists in educational disabilities/exceptionalities, 24 researchers and assessment specialists, and 20 employees of state and federal government agencies.

No respondents stated opposition to the multidimensional approach, although a few researchers and assessment specialists did suggest some refinements to the dimensions so that they could be differentiated more clearly. A small number also reminded the members of the Subgroup that much developmental work remains to be done in order to assess some of the dimensions reliably. Overall, sentiment for the multidimensional approach was extremely favorable, as evidenced by the following sample of comments:

> National Head Start Association, **VIRGINIA:**
> "We are pleased to see that you have used a broad definition of readiness which includes physical well-being and social and emotional development... We have been concerned that earlier efforts to assess social competence often begin with steps to assess cognition, yet despite previous intentions, fail to develop and use adequate measures of social and emotional development."
>
> Southern Association on Children Under Six representative, **NORTH CAROLINA:**
> "The advocated method of multidimensional assessment techniques that provide a developmental profile along several dimensions rather than the use of a single measure or index can never be emphasized enough. And fortunately this provides the core of the entire report."
>
> Early childhood educator, **NORTH CAROLINA:**
> "The multi-dimensional approach in developmental domains, as well as in the source(s) of data collection, has the potential of transforming assessment practices across the nation."
>
> Professor of public policy, **WASHINGTON, DC:**
> "Particularly important is the idea of school readiness as a multidimensional concept. As we monitor young children over time, we may discover significant progress in some areas, limited progress in others... but only if we distinguish sharply among different aspects of children's development."
>
> National PTA representative, **KENTUCKY:**
> "I am pleased that you are planning to look at the whole child, not just intellectual ability."

Early childhood educator and kindergarten teacher, **IDAHO**:
"All facets of the growing child need to be considered for an adequate assessment of his/her preparedness for school (I speak from my many years as a kindergarten teacher to this statement)."

NAACP representative, **ILLINOIS**:
"The explanations concerning dimensions of learning and development, focusing on assessment of the 'whole child' was refreshing."

Assessment specialist, **NEW JERSEY**:
"The five designated dimensions of learning and development are on target, and I applaud the idea of using multiple sources of information for purposes of deriving profiles."

Support for multiple data sources and multiple assessment methods. The second fundamental assumption which forms the basis for the assessment model proposed by the Technical Planning Subgroup is as follows:

2. *Given the multidimensional conception of early school experience that we recommend, an adequate assessment program must include multiple assessment perspectives. No single instrument or questionnaire, nor any other single source of data, can capture this complex view.*[3]

The Subgroup proposed that information be collected from four sources:

1) Parent reports;
2) Teacher reports;
3) A profile of children's skills, knowledge, and development; and
4) Performance portfolios.

The Subgroup's reasoning behind this multi-perspective approach was that "by attending to all dimensions of child development from a variety of perspectives, we expect to obtain a richer, more reliable view of the resources available to children as they begin formal schooling."[4]

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[3] National Education Goals Panel, Potential Strategies for Long-Term Indicator Development: Reports of the Technical Planning Subgroups, p. 9, September 4, 1991.

[4] National Education Goals Panel, Potential Strategies for Long-Term Indicator Development: Reports of the Technical Planning Subgroups, p. 12, September 4, 1991.

Reaction to this idea was also extremely favorable. Sixty-one respondents mentioned that they supported collection of data from multiple sources, using multiple methods, especially the solicitation of input from parents. Once again, support for this idea cut across all targeted subgroups: 22 were early childhood educators, 3 were parents/parent representatives, 8 were teachers/teacher representatives, 3 were health care providers, 4 were bilingual educators or language specialists, 3 were specialists in educational disabilities or exceptionalities, 19 were researchers and assessment specialists, and 17 were employees of state or federal agencies.

Two primary reasons for supporting the use of multiple sources and multiple methods emerged from the comments which were submitted. The first reason was that respondents saw this approach as a positive way to involve parents in their children's educations, as indicated by the following comments:

> Early childhood educator, **NORTH CAROLINA:**
> "The concept of collecting data from family members and the comprehensive scope of the assessment sends an appropriate and clear message to the nation, and I applaud your efforts in this regard."
>
> State Superintendent of Schools:
> "The inclusion of multidimensional data collected from a variety of information sources is a very strong component of this plan... Recognition of parents as sources of critical data regarding young children is a positive aspect of the report. I concur with the need to develop methodologies to more reliably gather information from caregivers."
>
> Early childhood educator, **NEW YORK:**
> "I also endorse the idea of an assessment process that integrates information gained from many perspectives. It is especially important that parents be included in the partnership of those responsible for children's growth and learning... I endorse the concept of obtaining information from parents. They are the persons closest to the child and have intimate knowledge gained over time."
>
> National School Boards Association, **VIRGINIA:**
> "The fact that such information related to a child's health history and a child's early interactional behavior is being sought will emphasize to parents and primary caregivers their importance in shaping the readiness of our nation's children. They can become effective partners with teachers in the development of their children if they are aware of the link between early childhood development, including pre- and postnatal care, and early relationships and future education successes."

Early childhood educator, **COLORADO:**
"I also applaud the goal of involving parents and helping them to become confident in their own competence as parents. Other things which delighted me by their inclusion is the collection of children's work (portfolios) and the recognition that all this takes time."

College president and five faculty members, **MASSACHUSETTS:**
"Parent Reports could be an excellent opportunity to understand how parents organize learning events in the home environment and what parents need to increase constructive interactions with their children."

Secondly, the use of multiple sources and multiple methods was seen as a technically sound way to ensure valid measurements because the assessment would not hinge on a single point of view or a single instrument:

Professor of education, **ARKANSAS:**
"Multiple Contributors to the Assessment. This is a wonderful idea. No one person has a lock on relevant information about a given child."

Specialist in compensatory education, **MISSOURI:**
"I agree that the new assessment must obtain information about young children from multiple perspectives rather than relying on any single data source. We have caused an injustice to early childhood education by misusing readiness tests and developmental screening tests in the past."

Professor of human development, **PENNSYLVANIA:**
"The idea of collecting assessment information from a variety of sources is also excellent. Clearly, a multi-informant data collection strategy is necessary if we are to obtain a holistic assessment of the child that is sensitive to ecological and multicultural factors."

Elementary school principal, **OKLAHOMA:**
"I feel it is very important not to use one instrument in assessment. Variety and input are needed from different areas."

Associate Superintendent of Schools:
"We think it is important that children's progress be monitored at more than one point in time and that information be gathered from more than one source... In some instances parental report will not provide all the necessary information that could be provided by other primary caregivers... We also are examining the feasibility of collecting information from multiple sources on the multidimensional development of young children."

Professor of child development, **MINNESOTA:**
"The document's modesty about the quality of assessment tools available for some purposes, and a need to develop more in social-emotional development is well-placed, and so are concerns about the validity of measures taken singly, such as teacher ratings."

Child psychiatrist, **CALIFORNIA:**
"Of the positions taken, there are several for which there should be no compromise: 1) no single instrument can be the sum of the assessment; 2) information must come from a variety of sources..."

Professor of public policy, **WASHINGTON, DC:**
"Parents and teachers sometimes differ in their assessments of children; these different perceptions, apparently contradictory, may in fact capture different aspects of reality. In any event, efforts to cross-validate perceptions of caregivers are to be encouraged."

Support for national sample, rather than individual assessment. The third fundamental assumption which forms the basis for the Subgroup's assessment approach is that:

3. *The purpose of the Early Childhood Assessment is to provide a national overview of young children's early learning and development, rather than an assessment of individual children or groups of children. Thus, for practical reasons it is essential that children be sampled. We do not wish to propose an assessment mechanism that can potentially disadvantage or stigmatize any individual child or group of children.*[5]

The depth to which this conviction is held by individuals involved in the care and education of young children is substantial. Fifty respondents emphasized that the national assessment should be administered to a sample, but not all, children. In fact, several respondents felt that the Subgroup had not gone far enough in establishing safeguards to prevent the use of the assessment on an individual basis:

Early childhood educator, **MONTANA:**
"I wanted to see more clearly stated, unless I missed it, that this would not be used in any way to exclude children from kindergarten and that children should not be excluded from entering public school when they are age eligible."

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[5] National Education Goals Panel, Potential Strategies for Long-Term Indicator Development: Reports of the Technical Planning Subgroups, p. 9, September 4, 1991.

Professor of individual and family studies, **DELAWARE:**
"I will briefly highlight several points of the report which I believe are particularly significant:... 2) the assessment should not be used as an individual readiness test, 3) it should be anticipated that there would be a desire by educators to use the assessment information in making decisions about individual children or classrooms; safeguards should be built into the assessment process to discourage this from occurring."

VERMONT State Department of Education staff member:
"As seen in previous efforts of developmental assessment, misuses and abuses have occurred which are very saddening. The report must go beyond the mere recognition of potential abuses and address what safeguards will be put in place (training, monitoring, etc.) to minimize their likelihood."

Families and Work Institute, **NEW YORK:**
"This group has been extremely careful in assuring that the assessment not be misused. I applaud the fact that you are suggesting that not all children and all assessment items be sampled and that data not be collected every year. I would like to see that notion stated more strongly than it is in the current document and that the charge be given to the National Commission on Early Childhood Assessment to ensure that this process is not used to 'label, stigmatize, or classify any individual child or group of children.'"

Professor of education, **WISCONSIN:**
"I agree with the recommendation that the early childhood assessment should be formed on indicators which sample children and, within children, sample types of information to be gathered. I certainly agree with the concern in the report that information not be used in any way that could potentially disadvantage or stigmatize any individual child or group of children. In fact, I would go beyond what is said in the report to recommend that information at the child level never be made available, even to parents and teachers of that child."

National Association for the Education of Young Children, **WASHINGTON, DC:**
"This response will not repeat the concerns raised in [the] report, but rather reinforce the point that the technical issues confronting a national early childhood assessment are immense. All the sources of bias and problems of reliability and validity that are inherent in standardized testing of older children are more challenging when the subjects are 5-year-olds. For this reason, we emphasize that the cautionary statements in the report are, if anything, understated rather than overstated."

The 50 respondents who supported a national sample of children for the assessment included 16 early childhood educators, 6 parents/parent representatives, 8 teachers/teacher representatives, 1 health care provider, 4 bilingual educators/language learning specialists, 17 researchers, and 15 state or federal agency employees. Some of their remarks mentioned practical reasons for supporting a national sample (e.g., reducing costs and assessment burden):

> National Network for Early Language Learning, **MINNESOTA:**
> "From a cost perspective, the idea of assessing a sample of children rather than every kindergartner is realistic."
>
> Early childhood educator, **MINNESOTA:**
> "I like the idea of sampling and of not expecting that the entire assessment be on a single child. I recall that the international study that looked at four-year-olds had such an extensive protocol that it took an excessive time. The Technical Planning Subgroup has reached a good decision in allowing for a comprehensive look at children while developing a realistic plan for gathering data."
>
> Professor of human development, **PENNSYLVANIA:**
> "Clearly, it would be very difficult and expensive to assess every kindergarten child in the nation in a given year, although this might be considered a reasonable idea by some. If this is not to be done, then sampling is obviously needed."
>
> Professor of public policy, **WASHINGTON, DC:**
> "We need more and better data; but as the authors of the report point out, we are better off with excellent data on a representative sample of children than with limited data on a much larger group of children."

The primary reason mentioned by those who supported the notion of a national sample, however, was not mere practicality; rather, it was a deep and abiding concern about protecting individual children from inappropriate use of assessment instruments:

> Researcher, **WASHINGTON, DC:**
> "Particularly important are the Subgroup's essential warnings that the proposed assessments (1) should not be used to screen or label individual children and (2) should entail sampling of children as well as instruments. To ignore these warnings would risk substantially harming children."

National PTA representative, **KENTUCKY:**
"I am pleased that you are recognizing the difficulty of assessment of children without stigmatizing them. Making it a sampling assessment is good. Assessing different children for different aspects of the assessment, rather than one child for everything, is even better. I believe that will help eliminate some of the negatives of testing very young children."

Early childhood educator, **IOWA:**
"This is a very healthy and multidimensional approach to evaluate the health and well-being of young children. The process attempts to focus on a national overview of children and attempts to protect individual children from unnecessary ridicule or stressful testing and evaluation."

U.S. Department of Education staff member:
"I appreciate the care and consideration the group gave to the topic, and the caution they advise against trying to use the system to label individual children or groups of children as 'failing' to meet the national goal -- rather it would be our failure."

Children's Defense Fund representative, **NEW YORK:**
"I have long been concerned about the negative effects of testing young children, and have experienced numerous situations where children were inappropriately labeled, stigmatized, or classified. These concerns lead me to strongly endorse your notion that any assessment be based on a sample of children, with the goal of offering a national overview of children's early learning and development."

State PTA Commission member, **ILLINOIS:**
"The assessment of school readiness is an area fraught with dangers, which the Panel appears to recognize, that is, the concern for inappropriate one-shot tests, stigmatizing or labeling children, or identifying individual children... The assessment of 'readiness,' must not be allowed to develop a set of criteria which will be used to measure individual children, as 'prepared for kindergarten.' The idea of a five-year-old who is already labeled a failure is appalling."

Of the 53 respondents who commented on the proposal that the assessment be administered to a national sample, 3 expressed concern that a sample-based assessment did not address what they considered to be a more pressing issue than the Subgroup's task. That is, instead of providing a national overview of children's learning and development for policy purposes, they felt that a more urgent need was to develop better instruments to assess individual children so that ones now in use could no longer be used inappropriately to label and compare individuals.

In addition to recommending that the assessment be administered to a national sample, the Technical Planning Subgroup recommended that the assessment be administered at three-year intervals. The reason for a three-year assessment cycle was two-fold. First, the Subgroup assumed that the type of changes that might be revealed by a national early childhood assessment system would not warrant an annual tracking system. Second, a periodic assessment schedule was proposed to reduce costs and assessment burden, given the complexity of the assessment tasks.

Ten respondents specifically endorsed this approach, including 4 early childhood educators, 2 parents or parent representatives, 5 teachers or teacher representatives, 2 bilingual educators or specialists in second language learning, 2 researchers, and 1 state board of education member. Some of their comments were as follows:

> Member, **COLORADO** State Board of Education:
> "Basically, I am in agreement with the recommendations: multiple assessments, periodic assessment, sampling."
>
> Early childhood educator and kindergarten teacher, **IDAHO**:
> "I agree that the complexity of the assessment task makes it only practical that the data collection only happen every three years."
>
> Child care professional and Children's Defense Fund representative, **KANSAS**:
> "The proposal appears to be excellent, especially... the suggestion that the assessment be done on a three-year cycle..."
>
> Professor of early childhood education, **GEORGIA**:
> "The proposal to develop new instruments, the use of sampling both of individuals and items, and the three-year cycle of assessment are appropriate and significant steps."
>
> National Education Association, **WASHINGTON, DC**:
> "NEA heartily endorses the notion of developing a system of assessment which would periodically collect national information about young children through the use of multiple indicators, a sampling process, and by employing unobtrusive measures to achieve its end."

Three respondents questioned whether the 3-year assessment cycle would be optimal for policymakers, since only two data points would be available by the Year 2000, and since important budget and policy questions might require resolution during alternate years when new data would not be available.

Support for collection of data at multiple points in time. The Goal 1 Resource Group originally recommended to the National Education Goals Panel that children's early progress be monitored at three points in time: before school, at the time of school entry, and during the first year of formal schooling. The Resource Group considered the collection of information at all three points critically important.

The Technical Planning Subgroup concurred, pointing out that most school "readiness" instruments currently in use attempt only to measure a narrow band of general knowledge and abilities at the point of school entry. The Subgroup members soundly "reject this reductionistic approach as one that cannot possibly encompass the range of abilities and experiences brought by children when they enter school, nor the range of knowledge and skills that they will need to be successful once they arrive there."[6]

Instead, they recommended that information about children's health, home life, and preschool experiences be collected prior to and upon school entry. During kindergarten, information would also be collected at different points. For example, the Subgroup advised that "the Teacher Report should be completed after the teacher has had time to get to know the child fairly well; a suggested administration point is at the beginning of the second semester of kindergarten."[7] The Profile of Children's Skills, Knowledge, and Development would be a single-point snapshot administered at the midpoint of the kindergarten year. Its complement, the Performance Portfolio, would collect a sample of children's work at several different points near the middle of the school year.

Eighteen respondents made specific comments supporting the collection of data at multiple points in time. Eight are early childhood educators, 2 are parents or parent representatives, 3 are teachers or teacher representatives, 1 is a health care provider, 5 are researchers, and 7 are state or federal agency employees. Respondents argued that multiple measures across time are essential, since developmental changes occur so rapidly at this age, and they underscored the importance of assessing prior-school experiences that shape children's eventual readiness:

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[6] National Education Goals Panel, Potential Strategies for Long-Term Indicator Development: Reports of the Technical Planning Subgroups, p. 7, September 4, 1991.

[7] National Education Goals Panel, Potential Strategies for Long-Term Indicator Development: Reports of the Technical Planning Subgroups, p. 9, September 4, 1991.

Professor of human development and family studies, **NEW YORK:**
"I particularly liked the recommendation that information be gathered on the preschool child's home life, and experiences."

Professor, **WASHINGTON:**
"It seems that an assessment at a single point in time belies the dynamic nature of early development. Best practices in assessment of young children suggest multiple measures across time, rather than viewing any discrete test as a realistic representation of a child's potential and abilities."

National School Boards Association, **VIRGINIA:**
"In addition to the Early Childhood Assessment, which focuses on children during their kindergarten year, data also should be collected about children's status and experience prior to formal school entry. As the report recommends, information should be obtained for indicators of prenatal health, parental age and education, preschool program participation, activities in the home, children's access to health care, quality of preschool programs, and nutritional status."

Child care professional, **NEW MEXICO:**
"If we are going to address children's early educational experiences in this country, we must address their experiences in child care. It is impossible to be interested in children's readiness to learn at age 5 and not be concerned about the quality of child care they have received since infancy."

Physician and consultant to National PTA, **COLORADO:**
"I would agree with all aspects of the proposal with the exception that the assessment should be done at either 2 or 3 as well as at age of Kindergarten entrance. Too many changes occur between 2 & 5 years of age in children's status from the developmental standpoint to allow one to be accurate and to make meaningful suggestions toward change if the 5-year assessment is the only one done."

Independent Professional Educators Association representative and former teacher, **SOUTH CAROLINA:**
"It is prudent to collect data at several different points, especially before the child enters school."

Early childhood educator, **MINNESOTA:**
"We would also suggest that this gathering of information be first attempted at the ages of three, four, or even earlier in order to obtain information on early factors that shape children's readiness."

Assessment specialist, **NEW JERSEY:**
"I also strongly endorse the Goal 1 Resource Group's emphasis on monitoring children's early progress at several points in time."

Early childhood educator, **COLORADO:**
"I applaud the idea of gathering information before entrance into school, including information gleaned from parents, early childhood teachers and day care providers. It is high time we recognized the importance of gathering longitudinal data."

Support for development of new instruments and sufficient time to field test, implement, and validate the assessment system. As the Technical Planning Subgroup members developed their model for an early childhood assessment system, they considered whether instruments were currently available which could be readily used to collect valid and reliable data on children's readiness along the five dimensions, from several perspectives, using a variety of methods, and at several points in time. Because the integrated system of assessment they proposed differs substantially from previous assessment efforts, they found that no instruments which had been developed for other purposes would meet all of the new assessment system's needs. They concluded that existing instruments would have to be substantially modified, and in some cases, new instruments developed, to ensure that the assessment system would meet rigorous standards of approval in the scientific community and yield accurate measures.

The Subgroup further stressed that sufficient time must be allowed to develop, field test, validate, and implement all components of the interlocking assessment system, lest negative consequences occur. They cautioned that (a) quick developmental work could produce weak indicators that might be seized upon for lack of anything better; (b) accurate assessment in early childhood is particularly difficult to achieve, and quick attempts to test children on a limited range of skills could produce inaccuracies that could be harmful to children as well as to early childhood programs; and (c) attempting to implement less than a multidimensional, multi-source assessment system could seriously distort the national picture that the Goals Panel hopes to draw about young children's level of readiness for school.

Twenty-three respondents voiced their support for the Subgroup's insistence that new instruments will need to be developed and adequate time must be allowed to ensure a high-quality early childhood assessment system. Those remarking upon this issue included 8 early childhood educators, 2 parents or parent representatives, 3 teachers or teacher representatives, 2 health care providers, 1 specialist in second language learning, 1 specialist in learning disabilities, 10 researchers, and 6

state or federal agency staff members. Although respondents acknowledged the urgent need for better instruments, they also emphasized that the assessment effort would fail if not carefully done and properly funded:

National PTA representative, **ILLINOIS:**
"The negative consequences to which you refer if time is not given to development of a proper assessment must not occur. You must ensure that the best interest of the child is the priority."

State Superintendent of Schools:
"The development of a quality public policy requires the type of data to be generated by the proposed assessment. Although this instrumentation is urgently needed in the field, I appreciate the Technical Planning Subgroup's commitment to allotting the time and resources required for adequate development and validation of the National In-School Assessment Profile for early childhood."

Professor of child development, **MINNESOTA:**
"The document's modesty about the quality of assessment tools available for some purposes, and a need to develop more in social-emotional development is well-placed, and so are concerns about the validity of measures taken singly, such as teacher ratings. By and large the document is informed by a great deal of intelligence about the actual adequacy of tools we have available, vs. the social-political demands being made for quick answers."

Professor of education, **WISCONSIN:**
"I absolutely agree with the recommendation on page 11 that validity studies be an integral part of the assessment development effort. In fact, I think validity studies should be an ongoing activity once the indicator system is up and mature. I also agree with the statement on page 13 that the assessment should not be considered complete until all components are developed, field tested, validated, and implemented."

National Association for the Education of Young Children, **WASHINGTON, DC:**
"NAEYC believes strongly that if funds are not allocated to implement the assessment as outlined in the report, the assessment should not be done at all... Too often we have compromised our standards due to lack of adequate funding; we have not measured well nor have we measured what matters most. This time, the stakes are too high. It would be better to spend the funds on programs that have been proven to work, such as WIC [Women, Infants, and Children] and Head Start, rather than on a 'quick and dirty' system that could do more harm than good."

Associate Superintendent of Schools:
"Our task force reached the same conclusion as the technical subcommittee that instruments do not exist at present that would serve our purpose."

Early childhood educator and kindergarten teacher, **IDAHO:**
"I would underscore your 'caution' in your Goal 1 report about taking time to develop 'an integrated and appropriate assessment system.' All facets of the growing child need to be considered for an adequate assessment of his/her preparedness for school (I speak from my many years as a kindergarten teacher to this statement)."

Professor of linguistics, **CALIFORNIA:**
"I would endorse the Subgroup Report on School Readiness, and agree that establishment of a National Commission on Early Childhood Assessment is important. But this could only work if (1) adequate funding for the research and assessment tools were provided, and (2) adequate funding for the validations of such assessment tools were forthcoming, with continuing funds for updating measures and the range of skills and experience surveyed."

Professor of education, **VIRGINIA:**
"I applaud the committee's recommendations to... develop, study, and implement these suggestions with a judiciously long timeline."

Children with Attention Deficit Disorders, **MASSACHUSETTS:**
"We also applaud the group for recognizing the need to move slowly to ensure that instruments are both reliable and valid."

American Medical Association, **ILLINOIS:**
"If not carefully done, this proposed assessment could yield data that are incomplete, unreliable, and potentially damaging."

Professor, **WASHINGTON:**
"The subgroup's emphasis on taking the time and resources necessary to develop a quality instrument is heartening."

Early childhood educator, **COLORADO:**
"Other things which delighted me by their inclusion is the collection of children's work (portfolios) and the recognition that all this takes time."

Professor, **MARYLAND:**
"I also support the need for careful development and pilot testing of measures."

Researcher, **WASHINGTON, DC:**
"Noteworthy are the Subgroup's recommendations for multi-dimensional, multi-instrument assessment; its very broad focus on diverse aspects of children's well-being; and its frank acknowledgement of the additional development that would be needed to implement its recommendations."

Support for the creation of a national body to oversee the development, implementation, and evaluation of the assessment. The Technical Planning Subgroup's call for the creation of an independent national body to supervise the development and implementation, and later the evaluation, of the early childhood assessment system was specifically endorsed by 29 respondents: 11 early childhood educators, 1 parent, 3 teachers or teacher representatives, 2 health care providers, 2 specialists in educational disabilities and exceptionalities, 9 researchers and assessment specialists, and 6 staff members from state and federal agencies. The following sample of comments support the Subgroup's stance that the complexity and importance of the task requires a long-term commitment from an independent oversight group to ensure a high-quality product:

Member, **MICHIGAN** State Board of Education:
"The recommendation that a National Commission on Early Childhood Assessment be established should be taken seriously. The assessment program will require careful monitoring to meet its intended goals as well as to maintain strict adherence to the standards that have been outlined. The field of Early Childhood Education is in need of the leadership this Commission will provide, as current assessment practice includes inappropriate use for placement, retention, and labeling of young children."

Southern Association on Children Under Six, **ARKANSAS:**
"SACUS concurs with the recommendation to form a viable National Commission on Early Childhood Assessment and would assist the Commission in every facet of its work."

Policy specialist, **MARYLAND:**
"The creation of a national commission on early childhood assessment, if properly funded, could be a vehicle through which this assessment recommendation is moved forward."

Physician, **ARKANSAS:**
"I am enthusiastic about the major recommendation of establishing a National Commission on Early Childhood Assessment. I urge adequate representation from the fields of General Pediatrics and Developmental Pediatrics on this commission, given the acknowledged link between maternal and child health and child school performance in the report."

Elementary school principal, **OKLAHOMA:**
"Excellent idea on formation of National Commission on Early Childhood Assessment."

Independent Professional Educators Association representative and former teacher, **SOUTH CAROLINA:**
"I agree with the National Commission on Early Childhood Assessment, and my hope is that classroom teachers will make up the majority of this panel."

The Council for Exceptional Children, **VIRGINIA:**
"We support the establishment of the National Commission on Early Childhood Assessment and its proposed purposes. We urge, however, that at least one member of this panel have experience working with infants and toddlers with disabilities or who are developmentally delayed."

Professor of education, **VIRGINIA:**
"The subgroup recommended that the National Commission on Early Childhood evaluate as well as develop the assessment. This, I believe, is critical and I would add that the activities of the Commission itself be subject to monitoring by a variety of individuals that represent different stakeholders. The political nature of this kind of activity is inescapable and the enactment of specific values must be held up to public scrutiny and discussion."

Researcher, **MICHIGAN:**
"The Technical Planning subgroup Report on School Readiness describes well the needed breadth of early childhood assessment and the importance of multiple measures, and I applaud the idea of a National Commission on Early Childhood Assessment."

Assessment specialist, **NEW JERSEY:**
"The proposed implementation plan and the call for a National Commission on Early Childhood Assessment are admirably forward looking and yet suitably cautious, given the noted gaps in our knowledge and instrumentation."

National Association of State Boards of Education, **VIRGINIA:**
"We agree with the major features of the Subgroup proposal and the recommendation to establish a National Commission on Early Childhood Assessment to guide a careful, high quality development process."

CALIFORNIA State Department of Education:
"The Department endorses the recommendation to establish an independent, National Commission on Early Childhood Assessment."

Early childhood educator, **PUERTO RICO:**
"We strongly recommend the appointment of the National Commission on Early Childhood Assessment for the development, supervision and evaluation of the Early Childhood Assessment delineated in the report by the Technical Planning Subgroup."

Southern Association on Children Under Six representative, **SOUTH CAROLINA:**
"I would like to see a National Commission on Early Childhood be established of which the Assessment team could be one component. Whatever group is formed, the task is monumental, but not insurmountable. Those of us concerned with young children need to promote such a commission wherever and whenever we can."

Two respondents suggested refinements to the governance structure proposed by the Subgroup. One suggested placing the evaluation function within an existing evaluation office to ensure independence of any evaluation efforts, and the other suggested anchoring the development stage outside of government and seeking private sources to fund the project.

Fundamental Concerns Raised About Assessment in General

As enthusiastic as response was to the report, it would be erroneous to suggest that respondents did not also raise some concerns that warrant discussion, or suggest improvements that warrant consideration. Three fundamental and strongly-felt concerns were raised by respondents about the assessment of young children generally, and the Goals process. Comments reflected broader concerns about assessment of readiness in general, rather than specific objections to the Technical Planning Subgroup's proposal. It should be noted that only 14 of the 184 respondents opposed any kind of a national in-school assessment. The concerns were:

Assessment must not divert resources from programs and services that benefit children. The concern which was most emphatically expressed by respondents about the first National Education Goal is that current interest in a national assessment of young children must be matched by efforts to improve children's quality of life. In fact, many respondents who pledged their support for the Subgroup's early childhood assessment system emphasized that they did so only if the data collected would actually be used by policymakers to improve the plight of children in the United States who face debilitating living conditions daily.

Thirty-eight respondents wanted firm reassurance that the resources and efforts directed toward the development of a national assessment would not divert resources from programs and

services that serve children directly (e.g., Head Start, WIC), nor divert attention from issues they considered urgent (e.g., providing good nutrition, health care, and health insurance to all families; expanding immunization programs; ensuring wider availability of quality childcare and preschool education programs, etc.). Eight respondents opposed the national early childhood assessment because they were not convinced that the end results would directly benefit children.

The Technical Subgroup members concur that emphasizing assessment alone -- though their charge -- is insufficient, and they are heartened by the readiness efforts of the National Association of State Boards of Education, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the National Governors Association, federal agencies, the Committee for Economic Development, the United Way, the Council on the Foundation of Teaching, and countless states and communities. The Subgroup senses that there is a need to share information about these efforts, since skepticism that the assessment results will actually drive improvement efforts seems to be fairly widespread, even among those who endorsed the Subgroup's proposal:

> Professor of education, **HAWAII:**
> "Although I endorse the conclusions of the Subgroup, I have serious reservations about the whole endeavor... If this is not part of a concerted effort to help children to get ready and to make schools more responsive to their needs it will be a waste of time, energy and money... To use much needed financial resources to develop an assessment program (even a good one) will divert funds from where they are most desperately needed -- in direct services to young children and their families. Unless this report is a part of a well-subsidized campaign to improve programs and services for preschool children it will be a drain on resources that could be better spent on more immediate needs."
>
> National Association for the Education of Young Children, **WASHINGTON, DC:**
> "NAEYC's main concern with the report is the challenge of translating it from rhetoric to reality. If the national early childhood assessment is done as outlined in the report, it will be expensive. We realize that it will be competing for funds with other assessment procedures as well as with the action plans for achieving the goals. NAEYC believes strongly that if funds are not allocated to implement the assessment as outlined in the report, the assessment should not be done at all."

National School Boards Association, **VIRGINIA:**
"NSBA is concerned that new and adequate funding for these activities be obtained and funding for existing educational programs not be negatively affected."

National Head Start Association, **VIRGINIA:**
"We believe it is critical that efforts to improve the assessment of children MUST be accompanied by corresponding efforts to expand early childhood services, including quality developmental services for children, health care and family support."

Professor of education, **CALIFORNIA:**
"How will the information lead to improved services for children? Gathering status data without consideration of the links to services means that the project becomes merely another political and academic exercise."

Professor of curriculum and instruction, **WISCONSIN:**
"More generally, my concern is that this entire effort is not linked to ANY systemic, national effort to improve the quality of life for the children who will undergo the assessments... Instead, I see a wholesale shifting of our intellectual and financial resources to developing new and improved assessment systems."

Specialist in parent partnerships, **NEW YORK:**
"This is a time of limited resources. To talk about assessment of school readiness when we lack a comprehensive family policy or provision for at least minimal health care for everyone, seems to me an invitation to tinker with a non-working system rather than developing new ways to support parents in the difficult task of rearing children."

Professor of human development, **CALIFORNIA:**
"If we know what should be done (and we do) then why have we not already acted to redress the truly horrible conditions in which so many of our children live (and we have not)? Further, when we have already isolated children's basic needs that have not been met, why do you not recommend direct action <u>immediately</u> instead of another long-term study of children's needs?"

NAACP representative, **ILLINOI$:**
"As in most studies, the results are 'blessings' on paper, but so difficult to implement. I'm concerned about proper funding for such an undertaking. Is this group, NEGP, or its Resource Group on School Readiness, concerned about school districts being equally funded? If the goal is to have <u>all</u> children in America starting school ready to learn, the focus must be on properly funding early childhood experiences."

Professor of family studies, **CONNECTICUT:**
"I comment out of frustration and the fear that creation of such a commission will be another tactic to delay action -- 'more research is needed before we can do anything'... The issues are not ones of knowing how to assess children but more fundamental issues of how to provide medical care to all, how to provide all families with meaningful participation in our society, and how to provide for the developmental needs of young children. These are more questions of values, will and resources. My question: Will putting money into and pinning hopes on the development of an Early Childhood Assessment system be another excuse to delay working on the real issues?"

National PTA representative, **ILLINOIS:**
"We urge that the data collected on the status of the nation's children be truly used to inform public policy-makers for the development, expansion, and/or modification of policies and programs that affect young children and their families to ensure that all children will be ready to learn by the year 2000."

National Education Association, **WASHINGTON, DC:**
"We at the NEA believe the nation should invest in this undertaking -- using <u>new</u> dollars, not monies diverted from other programs already serving some population of young children and their parents/caregivers. We further believe that the knowledge gained from this endeavor must lead to action on behalf of these youngsters. Whether we, as a nation, will muster the will to respond is a matter of continuing and overriding concern to the NEA... The development of this proposed assessment program promises to be extremely costly. Significant expenditures would also be involved in ensuring that the integrity of the system design be maintained. We believe this cost is justified but requires a solid commitment on the part of this nation and its policymakers that the information, once obtained, will be followed by the resources necessary to develop serious, coherent, and sensible change strategies. Without such a commitment, we will once again be engaging in data collection as an end to itself rather than as a means to an end."

<u>Assessment results should not be reported separately from contextual information on children's developmental and educational experiences</u>. Forty-two respondents expressed concern that the direct assessment solicited by the Goals Panel placed too much of the burden of readiness on individual children. They felt that heavy placement on direct outcomes emphasized whether children are ready for school without also considering whether schools and other societal institutions are providing sufficient help to children. The Goal 1 Resource Group acknowledged this point a year ago in their first report to the National Education

Goals Panel, when they stated that "one could argue that the right question is 'Are schools ready for the children?'"[8]

Respondents argued that results could not be interpreted with accuracy if children's academic outcomes are not linked to the contexts in which their developmental and educational experiences occurred. Respondents underscored the need to collect the type of information on children's health, home life, and preschool experiences that the Resource Group recommended should be collected for the before-school portion of the assessment system.

Two respondents who opposed direct assessment felt that reporting existing indirect measures (e.g., birthweight, poverty) would be preferable to creating a new, direct measure. Two others opposed the assessment system because they considered it technically unsound to measure children's direct outcomes apart from the contexts in which they develop -- indirect outcomes.

The Technical Planning Subgroup was charged to focus on direct indicator development. Indeed, the Subgroup firmly acknowledges the need for social and indirect indicators, as well. The members agree with the Resource Group's report that calls for collecting social indicator data as a part of the before-school assessment, including health and nutritional status, birthweight and prenatal care, children's access to health care and early education, home and parenting conditions, and the quality of and participation in preschool. The following sample of responses from the early childhood community underscore strong support for such a contextually-based assessment approach:

> College president and five faculty members, **MASSACHUSETTS:** "There is a danger in assuming that learning difficulties always reside in the child. Another way to ask the question is whether schools are ready to teach the diverse populations of children who are enrolling in our classrooms. In addition to information regarding the child, the Early Childhood assessment must explore the context of children's learning experiences."
>
> Families and Work Institute, **NEW YORK:** "The notion of readiness in this document rests too strongly on the children. I think that it is imperative to continue to monitor the supply, cost, and quality of early childhood arrangements."

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[8] National Education Goals Panel, Measuring Progress Toward the National Education Goals: Potential Indicators and Measurement Strategies, p. 4, March 25, 1991.

Professor of sociology, **CALIFORNIA:**
"I am struck by the fact that the report concentrates on the readiness of children when they enter school, but does not mention anything about the readiness of the schools to receive students."

Professor of education, **VIRGINIA:**
"A second concern is for the continued emphasis on children without a concomitant look at the organizations that are charged with serving them. Although I realize that the goal is focused on children and their readiness to learn when they start school, I would like to see a broader interpretation of what or who is assessed. As acknowledged in various places in the report, understanding the contexts in which children live and grow is integral to understanding them as individuals. The authors do discuss collecting information on contexts from parents and teachers, but I wonder if more information on classrooms and communities isn't warranted. By collecting and examining such data, we may be in a better position to understand the complexities of the situations and to make more sophisticated recommendations to child-related policies and programs."

National PTA, **ILLINOIS:**
"Given the factors that place 40% of America's children educationally at risk today: being poor, belonging to a racial or ethnic minority, having limited proficiency in English, being raised in a single-parent family or by poorly educated parents, or having a disabling condition, it is important that those elements affecting school readiness be addressed."

Professor of education, **ARKANSAS:**
"A companion effort to helping children become ready for this more formal learning is one which attempts to help school personnel be truly ready to teach children -- all kinds of children. While preparation of the children is essential, preparation of the educational system to help those children who somehow slip through the readiness cracks is equally important. Therefore, in order to achieve Goal #1, we must keep in mind the reality that readiness is a two-way street. The educational environment must be ready for the children, just as the children must be ready for the environment."

Professor of family and child development, **ALABAMA:**
"Interpreting <u>school readiness</u> as <u>getting the school ready</u> to help children learn is a more practical approach. This will enable schools to offer experiences appropriate for each child's developmental level that will take each student as far as possible."

Researcher specializing in second language learning, **CALIFORNIA:**
"The diverse contexts in which children develop is growing geometrically in this country as the diversity of our population grows arithmetically. These lead me to strongly recommend the abandoning of any child-based assessment of school readiness. Instead, what is absolutely needed is an assessment of the conditions under which development is unfolding for all of our children. We know that good health, stable and safe homes/neighborhoods, supportive and nurturing social, cultural and linguistic settings are associated with 'on-track' child development. We also know that many of our children are in non-stable families, live in non-safe homes/neighborhoods, and, non-nurturing social, cultural and linguistic environments. We need to document this very directly and develop strategies to ameliorate these at-risk development conditions."

Educational researcher, **WISCONSIN:**
"As a related point, I don't see the report giving enough attention to the collection of information about a child's education experience. I would think it essential that any indicator system have good information about the educational experiences of each child, so that, for example, educational experience can be related to such outcomes as social and emotional development or cognition and general knowledge. Without that, a great deal of the policy relevant value of the assessment will be lost."

Professor of individual and family studies, **DELAWARE:**
"Progress in the readiness of children for school needs to be assessed concurrently with the nation's progress in improving services which have an impact on school readiness. This type of information would be critical for making effective policy recommendations."

Extreme caution must be exercised to prevent inappropriate and inaccurate labeling and tracking of children. Thirteen respondents raised concerns about the appropriateness and validity of any assessments created for young children. This concern stems in part from a history of test misuse among this population. A number of respondents pointed out that misuses have included labeling, tracking, retaining children within grade, and denying children educational services because they were deemed to be "unready" for kindergarten on the basis of a single test score, even though they were of kindergarten age. Respondents provided ample testimony that these misuses continue to occur.

As a result, many individuals involved in early care and education issues are especially sensitive to any attempts to assess young children. Only two respondents stated their

opposition to any testing of young children whatsoever, including the proposed early childhood assessment. Others, while not directly opposed to the Subgroup's proposal, nevertheless urged constant vigilance throughout the development process to guard against biased instruments, testing practices, or reporting practices that could potentially stigmatize poor, disabled, limited-English proficient, or minority children. A small number of researchers also reaffirmed the Subgroup's assertion that accurate measurement of children is especially difficult, and instrument development will require considerable care and time.

The Subgroup recognizes the challenge at hand. They continue to believe that as a nation, we are up to the challenge, and that if developed with care, such an assessment can advance the status of the nation's children. The Subgroup members see their job as laying the groundwork for a high-quality comprehensive assessment system, and agree that this will require the type of cautious and considered work urged by their colleagues:

> National Head Start Association, **VIRGINIA:**
> "We realize and appreciate the serious nature of the task that the panel is assuming. Based on previous efforts to assess Head Start children, we are extremely cautious about the efficacy of assessment for young children and would strongly suggest that there continue to be a thorough review of the issues with ample time for discussion, input, and consideration."
>
> Member, **MICHIGAN** State Board of Education:
> "It is also very important that data not be reported in a manner which allows comparison by populations, by State, or in any manner which results in inappropriate use of the findings."
>
> Specialist in second language learning, **NEW YORK:**
> "My concerns about the Early Childhood Assessment package revolve around the topic of assessment of language development for children who are bilingual or are raised in a home environments where a language other than English is the primary language... These issues will be very difficult to resolve in that adequate testing is not currently available which is not culturally biased."
>
> National Council on Disability, **WASHINGTON, DC:**
> "I am very concerned about the information on assessment techniques and how those techniques will be drafted to give equal consideration and treatment to children with disabilities from minority populations. Those children are often forgotten and slip through the education net."

Specific Recommendations

As expected, important suggestions were raised by respondents. The Technical Planning Subgroup considers these suggestions extremely valuable, since they identify many of the technical and methodological issues which have yet to be resolved, and they outline the agenda for much of the developmental work that lies ahead. Some of these issues are extremely complex. The Subgroup is not convinced, however, that they can not be solved, and sees these issues as an appropriate starting point for the recommended national body which would oversee the development and implementation of the assessment.

Determining acceptable readiness standard. The Technical Planning Subgroup emphasized in their report that the concept of readiness should be viewed as a pattern of skills and experiences along a continuum in each developmental domain, rather than as a dichotomous classification of "ready" vs. "unready." This point prompted discussion from 12 respondents, who questioned how the assessment will decide what constitutes acceptable "readiness" in each domain.

Respondents affirmed the Subgroup's belief that the assessment should not attempt to create a "readiness criterion," "cut-off point," or "single, simplistic standard" that children must meet in order to be deemed ready for school. Yet a few also pointed out that the assessment will need measures that can distinguish children who are ready for school from those who are not. A small number of respondents warned that if the assessment attempts to assess only those skills and experiences that are expected of all children at age 5, the assessment runs the risk of creating an implied standard that is set at the most basic level. Some of the points raised by the twelve respondents which frame much of the national debate on assessment of readiness follow:

> Professor of human development, **PENNSYLVANIA:**
> "Clearly, a major problem in developing this assessment system will be selecting what criteria are to be used to decide what constitutes acceptable readiness in each domain, given that many of the areas to be assessed lack normative standards currently and may be in principle very difficult, if not impossible, to 'norm.' Thus, the committee will have to give major consideration to how the data to be gathered will be interpreted."
>
> National Association of State Boards of Education, **VIRGINIA:**
> "In several other goal areas, explicit debate and planning has centered on the problem of setting standards (and world class ones, to be sure!) as well as creating the assessment mechanisms. What is the approach on this issue for Goal One?"

Professor and specialist in second language learning, **CALIFORNIA:**
"There are no 'standard' forms of cognitive, social, emotional, language use or knowledge development. At the age level which the Group and the National Goals Strategy wishes to assess 'readiness,' it must be understood that what is actually being assessed at this level is child development."

Researcher on human development, **TEXAS:**
"What does it mean to expect certain skills of all children of kindergarten age? In my experience, it is reasonable to expect a wide range of skills. If the aim is to find what skills all children have, we are in danger of identifying only the lowest level of competence."

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, **MARYLAND:**
"It would appear that there is a need to identify some functional outcomes for the preschool years, that if met, will ensure that a child is ready to learn. These prerequisites for learning should be identified and the assessment process used to determine if the outcomes have been met. If they have, everyone will know that all children are entering school ready to learn. We suggest that the panel review the need to establish functional outcomes that can serve as the bases for assessment and evaluating movement toward accomplishing Goal 1."

Assessing diverse groups of children equitably. Closely related to the issue of how readiness in each domain will be determined is the issue of how to assess diverse groups of children equitably. The Technical Planning Subgroup stated in their report that "approaches to learning that vary within and between cultures must be respected," and that when collecting information from parents about the learning environment of the home, "care must be taken to respect cultural differences."[9]

Twenty-four respondents, primarily specialists in educational disabilities/exceptionalities and in bilingual education/second language learning, addressed the issue of sensitivity to linguistically and culturally diverse children and those with disabilities. A few respondents felt that the Subgroup had not sufficiently addressed the needs of these student populations because they were not explicitly mentioned in the report:

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[9] National Education Goals Panel, Potential Strategies for Long-Term Indicator Development: Reports of the Technical Planning Subgroups, pp. 10 and 15, September 14, 1991.

Professor of child and adolescent development, **CALIFORNIA:**
"Issues of bilingualism and second language acquisition during the preschool years have been grossly omitted. Please be sure to include and take into account the special needs of the growing number of children who are native speakers of languages other than English."

Professor of special education, **WASHINGTON:**
"If [children with moderate and severe disabilities] are meant to be excluded from your sample, that point should be explained clearly at the beginning of your document. Otherwise, the document should be worded in a manner that does not exclude children with disabilities."

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, **MARYLAND:**
"There is little mention of how children with disabilities will fit into the assessment system. The assessment process should be sensitive enough to differentiate speech, language, and hearing disorders from deficiencies in school readiness."

CALIFORNIA State Department of Education:
"In the sampling of children, the Department recommends the development of procedures to ensure that disadvantaged children, including those who are limited-English-proficient, and disabled children are included."

Several pointed out that the proposal did not address pertinent technical and methodological issues, such as whether languages other than English will be used to assess language minority children and to interview their parents:

National Network for Early Language Learning, **MINNESOTA:**
"We are concerned, however, that nowhere in the report is the problem of how assessment will be completed of children whose first language is not English. Since the number of children without facility in English who are entering our schools is high, especially in certain geographic areas, it is imperative that these children be included in the national assessment in order to provide an accurate national overview of young children's learning and development. The preparation of the assessment measures for at least the predominant minority languages should be an integral part of the assessment plan."

Researcher specializing in second language learning, **CANADA:**
"Given the emergent bilingualism/bidialectalism of so many U.S. kindergarten children, what language(s) will be used to assess late language and cognitive development and in which language(s) will parents be interviewed to assure their ability to provide the richest data on their children?"

Local school staff member specializing in second language learning, **VIRGINIA:**
"When assessing 'Dimensions of Learning and Development - Language Use,' students should have an opportunity to demonstrate their literacy and cognitive abilities through their first and second languages... Kindergarten students are more likely to be [limited English proficient] since this schooling experience may be their first experience with the English language. If you assess only the English language, students' emergent literacy potential may not be accurately demonstrated."

Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs, U.S. Department of Education:
"Although there is one reference to 'respecting cultural differences' (on page 11) we do not believe that this is adequate. For one thing, millions of parents are limited English proficient persons (LEPs). To rely on 'parent report' without addressing the question of how to extract the information from them, for instance in disregard of how well they could speak English -- whether they could communicate adequately the information or concerns they have to us, is a certain way of skewing the results. Furthermore, if a child, coming from a non-English background, is assessed only on 'emergent literacy experiences' (page 8) in English but not in its native language, we will be missing a great deal on the experiences that the child comes with on entering the school. Thus we believe that this whole issue needs to be addressed and incorporated in the subgroup report."

The Subgroup agrees that children with disabilities and those who are from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds should not be excluded from the assessment sample. They recognize that the number of limited-English-speaking children in the United States is growing rapidly, and agree that new assessment instruments should be created in the languages which are most widely spoken by kindergarten children and their parents to ensure that the richest and most accurate information about children is collected. The Subgroup recommends that the cost of developing assessment instruments and procedures in languages other than English should be an integral part of the cost-analyses which the Panel has requested for the proposed early childhood assessment system.

The Subgroup acknowledges, however, that simply creating instruments and procedures in non-English languages is not enough to ensure that diverse groups of children will be assessed equitably. A fundamental question that was raised by several respondents is how the assessment will balance the need to respect cultural differences, with the need to make some

judgments about children's preparedness to participate successfully in the formal school culture:

> Physician and child development specialist, **NEW YORK**:
> "Although all measures of behavior are subject to cultural influence, and interpretation biases of one kind or another, the assessment program needs measures that can discriminate children who are ready for school from children who are not."
>
> Professor of child development, **MINNESOTA**:
> "Tolerance of diversity and acknowledgement of different things being better for different children or circumstances, does not relieve the responsibility of acknowledging the need to make some judgments; it does not relieve the fact that everyone has such values and beliefs, and it is impossible not to deal with them."

This is an extremely important concern, based in part on a history of misuse of tests and test results that have adversely affected linguistic and cultural minorities. An issue of grave concern is that "school readiness" is culturally defined and interpreted. Normal developmental differences among groups of children which are culturally based may be misinterpreted as "evidence" that minority group children are not ready for school:

> Professor of anthropology, **CALIFORNIA**:
> "Culturally speaking, different minority groups develop differently, for example, in the area of social relations. Asian Americans (e.g., Chinese) and Native Americans do not follow the same trend of early social development as the mainstream. In the area of social development these and similar populations are likely to come out quite differently, although it does not mean that they are ready for school. But how will the results of the assessment be interpreted by those who do not understand the cultural basis of the differences?"
>
> Specialist in linguistic and cultural issues, **TEXAS**:
> "Teacher Reports. This section does not strongly enough describe how teacher bias will be diffused. If the questions on 'observable' behaviors are not constructed well, the door will be open to incredible and damaging cultural, gender, and economic bias for teachers who are insensitive to student diversity. A statement should be added to stipulate that the teachers will be trained to observe knowledge, skills, language in light of cultural and linguistic differences among poor and minority young children."

Professor of curriculum and instruction, **WISCONSIN:**
"The history of testing children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is one wherein -- almost alchemically and magically -- they come out looking worse than their peers. The upshot of this history has been a rhetoric of classification and a resultant stratification of opportunity."

Professor of education, **CALIFORNIA:**
"We are a culturally diverse people who have different values and practices, and it is highly probable that there will be subgroup differences in assessment data. If, indeed, the findings indicate that particular subgroups differ in readiness for school, how will such information be interpreted?"

The Subgroup members acknowledge that assessing diverse groups of children equitably, in ways that do not label, stigmatize, or classify them, will be one of the greatest challenges that lies ahead. They underscore the need to ensure that experts from special needs groups, such as the language minority and disability communities, are involved in the development of the assessment.

Sampling procedures. Four types of technical suggestions were raised, primarily by researchers and assessment specialists, about the sampling procedures proposed in the Technical Planning Subgroup's report. These were:

1) Stratified sampling;
2) Matrix sampling;
3) Adding a longitudinal cohort; and
4) Sampling 5-year-olds not in kindergarten.

Stratified sampling. The Subgroup did not specifically address the issue of how the sample would be stratified, an issue they assumed would be addressed in later work. Thirteen respondents suggested that the Subgroup specify that the sample of children to be assessed should be large enough to allow reliable estimates to be made by race, sex, socioeconomic status, and other demographic variables. Two of these respondents suggested that state-by-state results should be provided as well:

Assessment specialist, **NEW JERSEY:**
"The proposal focuses on a 'national' profile or 'national' aggregate. The heterogeneity of pupil characteristics is simply too great to make a national aggregate of any use for policy making. The proposed assessment should instead employ a stratified sample to permit reporting separately by region of the country, by gender, by major racial/ethnic group membership, and by levels of socioeconomic status."

Assessment specialist, **NEW JERSEY:**
"The report does not come to grips with the matter of providing information on demographic and subpopulation variations in readiness for school. Some examples are region of the country, urban vs. rural residence, and the family's economic resources. It is understandable that the subgroup wanted to avoid the possibility of stigmatizing one or another group of children. But there is an important counterargument that needs to be considered: when presented properly, information on subgroup variations can inform social policy in constructive ways. Moreover, given the Objectives listed under Goal 1 (page 3 of the report), especially the first of the three Objectives, it is difficult to see how a sampling plan that avoids stratification can possibly meet the basic aims of Goal 1."

Educational consultant, **VIRGINIA:**
"The national data collection should be supplemented by data collection in all states. The states have the primary responsibility for children's schooling. Policy and program choices are determined at the state and local levels. Results of a national Early Childhood Assessment could not be expected to lead to major shifts in educational practice unless coupled with findings that are specific to the individual states."

Researcher, **NEW JERSEY:**
"In designing the sampling strategy for the assessment, attention should be paid to ensuring the representation of key subgroups, including ethnic minorities and children from low-income families, that are often the special concern of public policies."

The Subgroup is well aware of both the public policy needs for information on student subgroups, and the fact that subgroup analyses can stigmatize and be potentially harmful to subgroups of children. The Subgroup does not think these positions are irreconcilable, but emphasize that concerns about entire subpopulations of children being labeled "unready" for school are legitimate. They feel that safeguards must be built into the assessment system to redress these concerns.

Matrix sampling. The Subgroup recommended that assessment items, as well as children, should be sampled. This means that no child would take all parts of the assessment. The Subgroup recommended this approach for three reasons. First, it would spread the burden of data collection so that no single child (or his or her parents and teacher) would be required to participate in all parts of the assessment. Second, the approach would allow greater amounts of information to be collected at far less cost. And third, it would avoid generating information that could be used inappropriately to classify individual children. Twelve

respondents specifically endorsed the Subgroup's decision to sample items through this matrix sampling approach, while many more supported its rationale for safeguarding individual children from inappropriate labeling, tracking, and classification:

> National PTA representative, **KENTUCKY:**
> "I am pleased that you are recognizing the difficulty of assessment of children without stigmatizing them. Making it a sampling assessment is good. Assessing different children for different aspects of the assessment, rather than one child for everything, is even better. I believe that will help eliminate some of the negatives of testing very young children."

> U.S. Department of Education staff member:
> "The proposed Profile, given its comprehensive nature, would be enormously time-consuming. It would be essential to do item-sampling in order to alleviate costs."

> **CALIFORNIA** State Department of Education:
> "The Department recommends that a different group of children comprise the sample for the three assessment points: prior to formal school entry, at entry to school, and during the kindergarten year. This procedure would protect young children from being overwhelmed and intruded upon. The focus would be kept on acquiring data for aggregation and setting policy rather than on the assessment itself."

> State Superintendent of Schools:
> "Would the use of different sets of children to assess different data components in any way confuse the results? If not, this seems to be a reasonable approach because of the extensive time needed to obtain the information in each data area."

The drawback to this approach, as 9 respondents pointed out, is that if the sampling is too fragmentary, it becomes impossible to see interactions between the five dimensions and the effects of preschool conditions such as health status on developmental outcomes:

> Professor of education, **WASHINGTON:**
> "Although I appreciate the importance of not misusing the data generated by this assessment, and understand the logic of sampling across children for different sections of the assessment, I am concerned that this practice would generate data that are not descriptive of any 'real' children and therefore are of limited use. I would strongly urge the Planning Group to consider in-depth study of selected children, rather than incomplete study of many children."

Professor of education, **WASHINGTON:**
"In the process of avoiding the creation of another 'gatekeeping' test, however, I believe the Subgroup has erred in the direction of compromising the quality of data to be collected. Specifically, the proposal for sampling specific domains of development across different children concerns me. The designation of behaviors into exclusive domains is at best arbitrary in young children, as acknowledged by the focus on the 'whole child' in developing the assessment proposal. Measuring isolated domains across children seems destined to obscure important information about the relationships between domains, and the impact of factors such as health status on developmental outcomes."

The Subgroup agrees that this information would be valuable, and concurs with the need for longitudinal studies. They suggest that attention continue to focus on how such information can be collected without compromising efforts to minimize cost, assessment burden, and likelihood of assessment misuse.

Longitudinal cohort. Eleven respondents suggested that a longitudinal cohort should be embedded in the sample. This means that instead of assessing an entirely different group of students every three years, a small group of students in the sample would be followed over several years' time to examine relationships between conditions that affect children's learning and development and their eventual level of school success. Two respondents suggested that the Subgroup consider sampling groups of kindergarteners in such a way that the early childhood assessment could be linked to other national data collections, such as the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). Respondents acknowledged the Subgroup's desire to maintain confidentiality so that the assessment could not be misused to label students, but argued that some policy recommendations would require examination of the conditions and characteristics of children that are predictive of school success:

Educational consultant, **VIRGINIA:**
"Measurement must be embedded in a longitudinal research strategy to inform future policy and program choices and to assess the return on the nation's investments in early intervention."

Families and Work Institute, **NEW YORK:**
"The plan should include a research component to collect data on a representative longitudinal sample... the purpose of the readiness assessment, as proposed, would be diminished without the verification that a longitudinal study would provide. Such data would not only provide a research basis for making modifications in the measures used, they would also provide the opportunity for societal remedial action."

Specialist in second language learning, **CANADA**:
"Though sampling and use of matrix item selection strikes me as most sensible for the large study, would it be possible to assess a much smaller sample of children on all dimensions in order to probe the relationships between them, to provide some illustrative case studies and possibly as the basis for a longitudinal study?"

Professor of education, **WISCONSIN**:
"I urge that validity studies consider what characteristics of children are predictive of later school success, at least in a correlational way, and ideally in a causal way. With that end in mind, I recommend that a longitudinal cohort be embedded within the indicator system and tied to assessment systems of other goals such as Goal 3 and possibly Goal 2."

Professor, **MARYLAND**:
"I do believe that predictive validity should be a primary focus of instrument development. Otherwise, the assessment will only focus on this year's wisdom about what children should be able to do."

The Subgroup concurs with the suggestion that longitudinal studies are needed, and suggest that further attention be given to how they can be built into the assessment system.

Five-year-olds not in kindergarten. The Technical Planning Subgroup proposed that the sample of students to be included in the early childhood assessment system be drawn from both public and private kindergarten settings. Five respondents suggested that basing the sample on kindergarten attendance would not yield a representative sample, since kindergarten is not mandatory in all states:

Professor, **MARYLAND**:
"The assessment must include five-year-olds who are out of school. Kindergarten attendance is not mandatory in most states, and out-of-school students are an extremely important subgroup, composed primarily of poor children. It is good to say (in goal 1) that all disadvantaged students will have access to preschool, but when a significant minority do not even attend kindergarten, universal kindergarten attendance must also become a goal."

Early childhood specialist, **IOWA**:
"Kindergarten is not mandatory -- a kindergarten sample is still representative of a group that is involved in the system. It is valid for this population, but there is still a population that is not included in this status report."

The Subgroup members, too, pondered this issue when developing their report. However, they reasoned that attempting

to locate and include children who are not in a readily accessible kindergarten setting would be cost-prohibitive. Furthermore, since recent evidence suggests that 98% of American children do attend kindergarten, they were not convinced that a sample tied to kindergarten attendance would be unduly biased.

Refinements to methodological components. A small number of refinements to each of the four components, or information sources, of the assessment were suggested in the feedback. Six respondents voiced concern that the Profile of Children's Skills, Knowledge, and Development, which was designed as a checklist administered by teachers at the midpoint of the kindergarten year, might reduce complex information to an unintended list of items that test passive knowledge:

> Researcher, **MICHIGAN**:
> "The profile of children's skills, knowledge, and development could become a test, particularly when described as 'an individually-administered inventory that samples behavior at a single point in time' (p. 10). The profile could become the primary assessment, relegating teacher and parent reports and portfolios to secondary status. It could focus on specific academic responses and ignore the broad domains of creative expression, social relations, conversation, and general logical skills. The proposed category of 'cognition and general knowledge' (p. 8) could be used to justify items that test passive knowledge of isolated numbers, letters, shapes, and colors. The profile could become a series of items in each of which a tester makes a demand on a respondent who is supposed to provide the one right answer without assistance. It could become analogous to a tightly scripted direct-instruction curriculum with prescribed behavioral sequences."

> Early childhood specialist, **COLORADO**:
> "The sources of information include a check list for teachers. In my judgment, narrative/descriptive data is much more valuable; check lists should be used as mind ticklers to be sure all possible areas have been observed. The danger exists that using check lists can become as meaningless as other gradings. Observations force people to be more thoughtful and to describe the uniqueness of children. The validity of observational data comes from observing over time by a variety of people. Children will profit as teachers begin to see that their refined observational skills assist them in becoming better teachers for all children."

Nine respondents expressed concern that extensive training will need to be provided to teachers and others who might conduct the assessment to ensure valid results, particularly the Teacher Report and Parent Report components:

Professor of human development, **PENNSYLVANIA:**
"An important issue in this assessment will be who carries it out. Having classroom teachers administer the child portion will be very different than having a school psychologist administer it, or some itinerant person associated with the national panel who comes in to carry it out. The pros and cons of this important question will need to be debated at some length. It was not clear from the report whether the parent information will be gathered by interview, checklist, or some other means. This needs to be specified. Also, the question as to who will administer this parent measure needs to be addressed, particularly if it is to be done by interview."

Child care professional, **FLORIDA:**
"With the rapid growth of day care centers, young children have become much more accessible for evaluation. Therefore, I believe that it must be acknowledged that child caregivers are vital to this process. However, it must also be taken into consideration that, many times, teachers/caregivers working in child care centers during the critical early years have very little professional training. This would have an effect on the type of information gathered, and on the determination of the validity of the instrument used in this segment of the assessment."

Fourteen respondents suggested that the Subgroup consider the use of portfolios carefully as a data collection strategy for a large-scale national assessment, given the technical problems of standardization and scoring that will have to be overcome:

Assessment specialist, **NEW JERSEY:**
"The report notes correctly that some of the assessments will depend on major advances in the state of the art. A case in point is the performance portfolio, which, by its very nature, is embedded (contextualized) in local educational practices that vary from community to community. For this reason, there is some doubt that portfolio data collection, scaling, scoring, and score interpretations can be standardized sufficiently to serve the purposes of the Early Childhood Assessment. In contrast to the other sources of information discussed in the report, performance portfolios might best be placed on a longer-term agenda. It would be unfortunate if the rather extensive resources, expertise, and time needed to develop the performance portfolios were to delay implementation of the assessment effort."

Professor of psychology, **PENNSYLVANIA:**
"The performance profiles seem an interesting idea; the measurement issues, however, seem very large and may compromise the utility of the information."

U.S. Department of Education staff member:
"While a performance portfolio can inform teachers and parents about children's progress and needs, it is unclear how portfolios could be used in a national assessment, such as is proposed here. Access to portfolios might provide material for some very interesting small scale studies, but usage on a national level seems prohibitive."

Health care provider, **NEW YORK:**
"While the portfolio approach is a novel idea, it seems impractical for purposes of large scale measurement and perhaps should be used only to provide some supplementary information."

The Subgroup recognizes the numerous development and implementation challenges that lie ahead. They concur that no single component of the assessment (e.g., the Child Profile) can possibly capture as rich or as complete a view as the multi-method approach that they suggest. The strong level of support from the early childhood community for their multi-source, multi-method approach further strengthens their resolve. They heartily concur that implementation must be accompanied by training. And although they concur that the Portfolio assessment will require considerable advances in our knowledge concerning its measurement properties, they are not yet willing to abandon the possibility of using this approach because of its ability to capture unique information that can not be derived from other sources.

Conclusions

Reactions to the Goal 1 Technical Planning Subgroup's report suggest two things. First, that involving the early childhood community in the Goals Panel's work through a rigorous public review has been extremely fruitful. In general, respondents were delighted to receive the Subgroup's proposal and to be given the opportunity to contribute to the process.

Second, in light of the extremely positive reaction to the assessment approach proposed by the Subgroup, the National Education Goals Panel can proceed with confidence that there is considerable support for a national early childhood assessment system, if developed with care, implemented with caution, supported with adequate funding, and accompanied by firm reassurances that the information generated will indeed be used by policymakers to benefit children.

The Technical Planning Subgroup is gratified to see the level of support expressed by their colleagues for their work. They believe that this process has been eminently worthwhile, and guarantee, in return, that the detailed comments, suggestions, and concerns submitted for their attention will receive their careful and considered thought.

APPENDIX A
Goal 1 Resource Group on Readiness for School

Convener	
Ernest L. Boyer	The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, New Jersey
Members	
James P. Comer	Yale University Child Studies Center, Connecticut
Donna Foglia	Evergreen School District, California
Sarah Greene	National Head Start Association, Virginia
Sharon Lynn Kagan	Yale University, The Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy, Connecticut
Luis Laosa	Educational Testing Service, New Jersey
Samuel Meisels	University of Michigan, Center for Human Growth and Development
Evelyn Moore	National Black Child Development Institute, Washington, DC
Lucile F. Newman	Brown University, Medical School, Rhode Island
Douglas Powell	Purdue University, Child Development and Family Studies, Indiana
Julius Richmond	Harvard Medical School, Massachusetts
James Wilsford	Jim Wilsford Associates, Inc., South Carolina
Nicholas Zill	Child Trends, Inc., Washington, DC

APPENDIX B
Goal 1 Technical Planning Subgroup on Readiness for School

Leader

Sharon Lynn Kagan	Yale University, The Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy, Connecticut

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Ernest L. Boyer	The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, New Jersey
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M. Elizabeth Graue	University of Wisconsin-Madison
Luis Laosa	Educational Testing Service, New Jersey
Samuel Meisels	University of Michigan, Center for Human Growth and Development
Lucile F. Newman	Brown University, Medical School, Rhode Island
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Joseph Stevens	Georgia State University, College of Education
Sheldon White	Harvard University, Department of Psychology, Massachusetts
Nicholas Zill	Child Trends, Inc., Washington, DC

APPENDIX C
Partial List of Organizations
from Which One or More Members Submitted Responses to
the Goal 1 Technical Planning Subgroup Report*

Early Care and Early Childhood Education

1) Center for Development, Education, and Nutrition
2) Child Care Connections
3) Child Growth and Development Corporation
4) The Children's Center, Inc.
5) Children's Defense Fund
6) Children's Services of Colorado, Inc.
7) Kansas Action for Children, Inc.
8) National Association for the Education of Young Children
9) National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education
10) National Council on Jewish Women, Center for the Child
11) National Head Start Association
12) Southern Association on Children Under Six
13) Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth

Parents/Families/Communities

1) Coalition for Children, Youth, and Families
2) Community Services for Children, Inc.
3) Families and Work Institute
4) Home and School Institute
5) NAACP
6) National PTA
7) Parent/Child, Inc.

Teachers/Schools

1) Council for American Private Education
2) Independent Professional Educators Association
3) Kentucky Academy for School Executives/Kentucky LEAD
4) National Association of Episcopal Schools
5) National Education Association
6) National PTA
7) National School Boards Association

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* While some statements submitted to the National Education Goals Panel represent official positions taken by an organization, others were submitted as the views of individuals who did not presume to represent the views of their institutions.

Appendix C (cont.)

Health Care

1) American Medical Association
2) Association of American Medical Colleges
3) Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors
4) Mountain States Health Corporation
5) National Association of Children's Hospitals and Related Institutions
6) National Association of Hispanic Nurses
7) National Black Nurses Association
8) National Health Education Consortium
9) National Perinatal Association
10) Organization for Obstetrical, Gynecological & Neonatal Nurses

Bilingual Education/Language/Culture

1) American Language and Literacy
2) Desegregation Assistance Center, Intercultural Development Research Association
3) National Association for Bilingual Education
4) National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning
5) National Network for Early Language Learning
6) Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

Educational Disabilities and Exceptionalities

1) American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
2) Children with Attention Deficit Disorders
3) Council for Exceptional Children
4) National Center for Learning Disabilities
5) National Council on Disability

Research/Assessment/Policy/Higher Education

1) American Association of State Colleges and Universities
2) American Educational Research Association
3) American Psychological Association
4) Center for Assessment and Policy Development
5) Collins Management Consulting, Inc.
6) Educational Testing Service
7) Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development
8) Fund for Educational Excellence
9) High/Scope Educational Research Foundation
10) Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.
11) The RAND Corporation
12) RMC Research Corporation
13) Society for Research on Child Development

Appendix C (cont.)

State and Federal Government

1) Administration for Children, Youth, and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
2) National Association of State Boards of Education
3) National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education
4) Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs, U.S. Department of Education
5) Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education
6) Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, U.S. Department of Education
7) Office of Policy and Planning, U.S. Department of Education
8) State Chapter 1 Directors

END NOTES

1. These counts should be viewed only as estimates, since:

   (a) The response sheet did not ask respondents to identify themselves by category (e.g., parent, teacher, childcare provider). Although some individuals identified themselves in their remarks as a parent, former teacher, etc., it was not possible to obtain a precise count for some of the categories.

   (b) The categories are not mutually exclusive. For example, a single respondent might be a parent, a kindergarten teacher, and the executive director of a national early childhood education organization. In such cases, individuals were counted in each applicable category.

   (c) Some respondents were representing the views of a considerably larger group of individuals. For example, comments received from two representatives of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) were weighted as two responses, though they actually represent the consensus of the NAEYC Governing Board and were submitted on behalf of 77,000 NAEYC members.

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NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS PANEL

REACTIONS TO THE GOAL 1 TECHNICAL PLANNING SUBGROUP REPORT ON SCHOOL READINESS

Executive Summary

Cynthia D. Prince, Ph.D.
Senior Research Associate

March 27, 1992

92–03 ES

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REACTIONS TO THE GOAL 1 TECHNICAL PLANNING SUBGROUP REPORT ON SCHOOL READINESS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

This document summarizes reactions to the proposed creation of an early childhood assessment system, and in particular, to the in-school component of that system, consisting of a kindergarten year assessment. The proposal was made to the Goals Panel on September 4, 1991, by Dr. Ernest Boyer and Dr. Sharon Lynn Kagan, as representatives of the Goal 1 Resource Group and Technical Planning Subgroup. In that report, the Subgroup recommended:

1. that the in-school component of the assessment draw a profile of children's early learning and development along five dimensions:

   - physical well-being and motor development;
   - social and emotional development;
   - approaches toward learning;
   - language usage; and
   - cognition and general knowledge.

2. that the assessment gather information from multiple sources:

   - parent reports;
   - teacher reports;
   - performance portfolios; and
   - profiles of children's skills, knowledge, and development.

3. that this information be collected at several points during the kindergarten year;

4. that a national sample of students be assessed every three years:

   - to reduce the costs of data collection;
   - to safeguard against potential misuses of assessment instruments for classifying individual students or groups of students; and
   - to minimize response burden for any single child.

5. that a national body be established to oversee the development, implementation, and evaluation of such an assessment.

The Panel requested that the Technical Planning Subgroup's report be disseminated broadly in order to provide an opportunity for a wide variety of individuals and organizations interested in the care and education of young children to react to the ideas presented in it.

Dissemination of the Report

During late December 1991, nearly 1,000 copies of the Goal 1 Technical Planning Subgroup Report on School Readiness were disseminated to individuals and to more than eighty national organizations, with an accompanying request for feedback. Using an open-ended instrument, audiences were invited to review the document and send their comments to the Panel. Individuals were not asked to focus on any particular issues presented in the Technical Planning Subgroup's report, nor to answer specific questions.

A total of 169 responses to the report, comprising 252 pages of feedback, was received from 184 respondents. Responses were received from 43 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Canada. A partial list of the organizations from which responses were submitted is attached.

The following breakdown (based on institutional affiliation, title, and in some cases, self-identification) provides a rough estimate of the different constituency groups represented in the pool of 184 respondents. (Subgroups do not total 184, since categories are not mutually exclusive.)

58 specialists in early care and early childhood education;
20 parents or parent/family/community representatives;
22 teachers, teacher representatives, local school and school district staff;
15 health care providers;
13 bilingual educators or specialists in second language learning;
10 educators specializing in the education of children with disabilities and exceptionalities;
62 researchers, assessment specialists, professors and other representatives of higher education; and
57 state and federal government agency employees.

Enthusiastic Support for the Proposed Assessment

Reaction to the assessment approach proposed by the Goal 1 Technical Planning Subgroup was overwhelmingly positive: 130 respondents made specific favorable comments, and many pledged continued support and assistance to the National Education Goals Panel to see that the proposed assessment system is implemented as intended. Support for the

assessment came from across the nation and from across a wide variety of individuals and organizations interested in the care and education of young children.

Areas of the Report Singled Out as Particularly Meritorious

In addition to the strong level of overall support for the proposed early childhood assessment system, six areas were singled out for praise by substantial numbers of respondents. Since respondents were not asked to focus on any particular issues, it is noteworthy that praise in these areas appeared throughout the comments.

Number specifically endorsing:	Area
63	Multidimensional approach
61	Multiple data sources and assessment methods
50	National sample, rather than individual assessment (10 specifically endorsing 3-year assessment cycle for the national sample)
29	Creation of a national body to oversee development, implementation, and evaluation of the assessment
23	Development of new instruments, allowing sufficient time to field test, implement, and validate the assessment system
18	Collection of data at different points in time (before school, at school entry, during school)

Fundamental Concerns Raised About Assessment in General

Three fundamental and strongly-felt concerns were raised by respondents about the assessment of young children in general, and about the Goals process. Comments reflected broader concerns about the assessment of readiness in general, rather than specific objections to the Technical Planning Subgroup's proposal. It should be noted that only 14 of the 184 respondents opposed any kind of a national assessment. The concerns were:

1. Assessment must not divert resources from programs and services that benefit children. The concern which was most emphatically expressed by respondents is that current interest in a national assessment of young children must be matched by equal interest in efforts to improve children's quality of life. Thirty-eight respondents wanted firm reassurance that the resources and efforts directed toward the development of a national assessment would not divert resources from programs and services that serve children directly, nor divert attention from issues they considered urgent (e.g., providing good nutrition, health care, and health insurance to all families; expanding immunization programs; ensuring wider availability of quality early care and education programs, etc.).

2. Assessment results should not be reported separately from contextual information on children's developmental and educational experiences. Forty-two respondents expressed concern that the direct assessment solicited by the Goals Panel placed too much of the burden of readiness on individual children. They felt that heavy placement on direct outcomes emphasized whether children are ready for school without also considering whether schools and other societal institutions are ready for children. Respondents underscored the need to collect indirect measures of children's health, home life, and preschool experiences that the Resource Group recommended should be collected for the before-school portion of the assessment system.

3. Extreme caution must be exercised to prevent inappropriate and inaccurate labeling and tracking of children. Thirteen respondents raised concerns about the appropriateness and validity of any assessment created for young children. This concern stems in part from a history of test misuse among this population, including labeling, tracking, retaining children within grade, and denying children educational services because they were deemed to be "unready" for kindergarten on the basis of a single test score, even though they were of kindergarten age. Respondents urged constant vigilance throughout the development process to guard against misuse. A small number of researchers also reaffirmed the Subgroup's assertion that accurate measurement of children is especially difficult, and instrument development will require considerable care and time.

Specific Recommendations

As expected, important suggestions were raised by respondents. The Technical Planning Subgroup considers these suggestions extremely valuable, since they define the technical and methodological issues which have yet to be resolved, and they outline the

agenda for much of the developmental work that lies ahead. Some of these issues are extremely complex. The Subgroup is not convinced, however, that they can not be solved, and sees these issues as an appropriate starting point for the recommended national body which would oversee the development and implementation of the assessment.

Determining acceptable readiness standard. Twelve respondents questioned how the assessment will decide what constitutes acceptable "readiness" in each domain, given the Subgroup's conception of readiness as a pattern of skills and experiences along a continuum in each developmental domain, rather than as a dichotomous classification of "ready" vs. "unready."

Assessing diverse groups of children equitably. Twenty-four respondents addressed the issue of sensitivity to linguistically and culturally diverse children and to those with disabilities. Several questioned whether languages other than English will be used to assess language minority children and their parents, and how the assessment will balance the need to respect cultural differences with the need to make some judgments about children's preparedness to participate successfully in the formal school culture.

Sampling procedures. Four types of technical suggestions were offered:

1. Thirteen respondents suggested that the subgroup specify that the sample of children should be large enough to allow reliable estimates to be made by race, sex, socioeconomic status, and other demographic variables; two suggested that state-by-state estimates should be provided as well.

2. Twelve respondents specifically endorsed the Subgroup's use of a matrix sampling approach (whereby no child would participate in all parts of the assessment), while many more supported its rationale for safeguarding individual children from inappropriate labeling, tracking, and classification. Nine respondents pointed out that matrix sampling makes it difficult to see relationships between the dimensions.

3. Eleven respondents suggested that a smaller group of students be followed across several years' time, and two suggested that the Subgroup consider linking the early childhood assessment system to other national data collections.

4. Five respondents suggested that the sample should not be restricted only to those 5-year-olds attending kindergarten, since kindergarten is not mandatory in all states.

Refinements to methodological components. A small number of respondents voiced concerns regarding specific components of the assessment. Six expressed concern that the Child Profile, designed as a checklist of observable behaviors, might reduce complex information to a list of items that assess passive knowledge. Fourteen suggested that the Subgroup consider the use of Portfolios carefully as a data collection strategy for a large-scale national assessment, given the technical problems of standardization and scoring that will have to be resolved. And nine noted that extensive training will need to be provided to teachers and others involved in administering the assessment to ensure valid results.

Response of the Technical Planning Subgroup

The Technical Planning Subgroup respects the concerns raised by respondents, and grappled with them in preparing their report. With regard to the three fundamental concerns raised about assessment of young children in general, the Subgroup concurs that emphasizing assessment alone is insufficient, even though their charge was to focus on direct indicator development. Indeed, the Subgroup firmly acknowledges the need for social and indirect indicators, as well. The members agree with the Resource Group's report that calls for collecting social indicator data as a part of the before-school assessment. The Subgroup recognizes that assessing readiness will be challenging. But they continue to believe that as a nation we are up to the challenge, and that if developed with care, such an assessment can advance the status of the nation's children.

With regard to the specific recommendations suggested, the Subgroup acknowledges that assessing diverse groups of children equitably, in ways that do not label, stigmatize, or classify them, will be one of the greatest challenges that lies ahead. They underscore the need to ensure that experts from special needs groups, such as the language minority and disability communities, are involved in the development of the assessment. They agree that information on subgroups and on relationships between conditions that affect children's learning and their eventual school success can be valuable information for policymakers, and they concur with the need for longitudinal studies. They share respondents' concerns that the assessment results be representative, but feel that sampling 5-year-olds who are not attending kindergarten would not be cost-effective, especially since recent evidence suggests that 98% of American children do attend kindergarten. The Subgroup recognizes the numerous development and implementation challenges that lie ahead, but remains convinced that given proper support and attention, the assessment is both feasible and necessary.

Reactions to the Goal 1 Technical Planning Subgroup's report suggest that involving a wide variety of groups interested in the care and education of young children in the Goals Panel's work through a rigorous public review has been extremely fruitful. In general, respondents were delighted to receive the Subgroup's proposal and to be given the opportunity to contribute to the process.

Second, in light of the extremely positive reaction to the assessment approach proposed by the Subgroup, the National Education Goals Panel can proceed with confidence that there is considerable support for a national early childhood assessment system, if developed with care, implemented with caution, supported with adequate funding, and accompanied by firm reassurances that the information generated will indeed be used by policymakers to benefit children.

The Technical Planning Subgroup is gratified to see the level of support expressed by their colleagues for their work. They believe that this process has been eminently worthwhile, and guarantee, in return, that the detailed comments, suggestions, and concerns submitted for their attention will receive their careful and considered thought.

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